Western University
Scholarship@Western

Digitized Theses | Digitized Special Collections

1975

The Unhoused Imagination: The Struggle For Imaginative Survival In Canadian Prairie Fiction

Richard Terrence Harrison

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses

Recommended Citation
Harrison, Richard Terrence, "The Unhoused Imagination: The Struggle For Imaginative Survival In Canadian Prairie Fiction" (1975). *Digitized Theses*. 816.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/816

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Special Collections at Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digitized Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca, wlswadmin@uwo.ca.

THE UNHOUSED IMAGINATION: THE STRUGGLE FOR IMAGINATIVE SURVIVAL IN CANADIAN PRAIRIE FICTION

by

Richard Terrence Harrison

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies

The University of Western Ontario

London, Ontario

November, 1974

© Richard Terrence Harrison 1974.

ABSTRACT

Settlement of the Canadian prairies has been characterized by the collision of basically European sensibilities with a strange, awesome, and uncompromising environment. The encounter has evidently had the power to stimulate the imagination, but to a people deprived of familiar cultural order, the immensity of the plains has also been threatening. In this exposed or "unhoused" condition, the imagination has had to struggle especially hard to survive and to humanize its surroundings. For the English-speaking prairie-dwellers at least, the landscape seems to have been a difficult one to humanize, and the struggle has remained a consistent theme in their literature. Novelists have also taken a part in the struggle, developing their own "house of fiction" or set of conventional forms and techniques suited to the portrayal of prairie experience. This thesis traces the struggle for imaginative survival as it appears in selected fiction written in English about the prairie provinces.

The introductory chapter explores the extent of the imagination's struggle with the prairie, evident not only in fiction but in the English-speaking culture generally. The settlers' typical spatial arrangements, including houses, hedged lots, fenced fields, and rectangular land surveys all speak of an urgent need for order, while direct artistic and literary expression on the prairie can be seen as a continuing search for a less tangible order.

The fiction of the Nineteenth Century studied in Chapter II is dominated by attempts to force the new experience into traditional forms such as Old World romances and novels of manners. The first unifying vision of the West is the Garden Myth appearing around the turn of the century in the work of Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, R.J.C. Stead, and others examined in Chapter III.

The mid-1920's saw the emergence of a realistic fiction of rural prairie life in the work of Frederick Philip Grove, Martha Ostenso, and R.J.C. Stead, and their development of a starkly realistic view of the prairie was carried on through the grim depression years and into the 1950's by writers such as Sinclair Ross and Edward McCourt. Historically the growth of prairie realism in fiction about spans the period of transition from rural agrarian to urban industrial prairie, and it is characterized by a recognition that man has spiritually and imaginatively alienated himself from the land. Chapter IV, "Alienation from the Land," is devoted to general themes and images expressive of man's alienation from the land, while Chapter V, "The House of the Imagination," concentrates on more specific imagery of hostility between the civilized imagination and the prairie landscape. The house itself is recognized as a central image, representing as it does both man's first defence against his environment and his first cultural assertion of his place in that environment.

Contemporary prairie novelists such as Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, and Robert Kroetsch, discussed in Chapter VI, "Time and Distance," are faced with a rural prairie which is largely past, no longer

a thing "out there" to be encountered in the present but a territory inside the psyche which must be explored in the past for the sake of understanding the present. On their search for the prairie within, they turn away from the traditional preoccupation with space to pursue an interest in time, and especially in finding roots in the prairie past.

The conclusion of this thesis draws attention to the fact that most prairie fiction emphasizes the defensive, reactive function of the imagination and must be balanced with an awareness of the more positive, outgoing impulse of the prairie imagination, of which the existence of the fiction itself is the best possible evidence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my Thesis Advisor, Dr. James Reaney, for encouragement and stimulation as well as for direction, and Dr. A.B. Conron for painstaking attention to each draft and for much detailed advice in preparing this manuscript. I also wish to thank the students in my graduate seminars on prairie fiction at the University of Alberta for their helpful discussion of the subject and for many insights I cannot now individually identify or acknowledge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

The author of this thesis has granted The University of Western Ontario a non-exclusive license to reproduce and distribute copies of this thesis to users of Western Libraries. Copyright remains with the author.

Electronic theses and dissertations available in The University of Western Ontario's institutional repository (Scholarship@Western) are solely for the purpose of private study and research. They may not be copied or reproduced, except as permitted by copyright laws, without written authority of the copyright owner. Any commercial use or publication is strictly prohibited.

The original copyright license attesting to these terms and signed by the author of this thesis may be found in the original print version of the thesis, held by Western Libraries.

The thesis approval page signed by the examining committee may also be found in the original print version of the thesis held in Western Libraries.

Please contact Western Libraries for further information:
E-mail: libadmin@uwo.ca
Telephone: (519) 661-2111 Ext. 84796
Web site: http://www.lib.uwo.ca/

CHAPTER I

THE SEARCH FOR FORM AND ORDER IN PRAIRIE LANDSCAPE

> "All discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind."
>
> Henry Kreisel[1]

Life on the Canadian prairie has often been a struggle for bare survival. While the physical, economic and political struggles have been apparent, especially in the more spectacular eras of early pioneering and of depression and drought during the 1930's, there has also been a quiet but consistent struggle for imaginative survival on the prairies. It is seldom distinguished as a separate and equal necessity or even seen as essential to the outward struggles. Nellie McClung, for example, gives us an image of defeated pioneers leaving the prairie in 1880. It is the woman in particular who was broken down:

> She wore a black silk dress and lace shawl and a pair of fancy shoes, all caked with mud. She would have been a pretty woman if she would only stop crying. She hated the country, she sobbed, it was only fit for Indians and squaws and should never have been taken from them.[2]

There is something poignant about this figure in silk and lace on the plains of Manitoba, a kind of pathetic gallantry in the face of defeat. Mrs. McClung, a pioneer to the core, sees how unequal the woman is to the physical rigours of pioneering. Her hopelessly impractical

clothing is symptomatic, but Mrs. McClung does not notice that it also represents a type of human order this woman of Upper Canada depends on to protect her from the rude and chaotic world she has been confronted with. It is a poor defence, and she has lost the battle in more than a physical way. Her value as an image is that her imaginative defences are only slightly more obvious and futile than those of a great many prairie settlers, even some who succeeded materially. The fiction written about the prairies everywhere reveals this intimate and changing relationship between the need for imaginative order and the physical struggle for survival.

Edward McCourt's The Canadian West in Fiction, the first major published work on Canadian prairie fiction, is centrally concerned with the need to capture the new land imaginatively in fiction.[3] McCourt contends that his authors have failed to do this, or succeeded in only a limited way, but he ascribes their failure to limitations of literary genius and craftsmanship more than to difficulties inherent in the subject itself. As a result, he does not concentrate directly on any unique challenge the plains environment presents to the imagination of writer and settler alike. Jack Warwick, treating the roughly analogous French-Canadian fiction in The Long Journey,[4] examines more explicitly the response of the imagination to a strange land, and so does Henry Nash Smith in his broader study of attitudes toward the American West in Virgin Land.[5] Both Warwick and Smith, however, are more concerned with the place that a changing image of the West occupies in the total imagination of a people than with the direct impact of the plains upon the imaginations of those who have gone there. More recently, Laurence

Ricou's Vertical Man / Horizontal World studies the power of the landscape as reflected in the fiction but does not concern itself with man's cultural reactions to the landscape.[6] All four books provide valuable starting points, but not models, for an exploration of the struggle for imaginative survival reflected in Canadian prairie fiction.

The present study is devoted almost exclusively to fiction written in English. Aside from the practical need to limit the material examined, there is some evidence that the problems of the imagination have been particularly acute for members of an English-speaking culture settling on the plains. Other kinds of imaginative response to the land, in non-fiction, in painting, architecture, and social organization, have been drawn in where they help to reveal what the novelists are doing, and to illustrate the pervasiveness of the problem the novelists are dealing with. I confine myself, somewhat more loosely, to fiction set on the prairie. For the sake of convenience the term "prairie" can reasonably be applied to the settled areas of all three prairie provinces. Though they include considerable variation, they share enough general similarities of climate, topography, and mode of settlement to make them more like each other than like any other region of Canada. As McCourt says in the Preface of his The Canadian West in Fiction:

> The Prairie Provinces constitute the most homogeneous of the great natural geographic divisions within this country. In spite of the abutment of the Rocky Mountains on the western flank of Alberta, all three, in their settled areas, are primarily flat and agricultural; they are hot in summer and cold in winter and the wind blows hard and often across them. The sun sets over them in a blaze of colour beyond the comprehension of anyone unfamiliar with

> the prairies; and the great arch of northern lights is a common sight three-quarters of the year. The provinces are alike in heterogeneity of their people, the Anglo-Saxon constituting in each something less than half the population. All three are bordered by Americans on the south and a vast, virtually unexplored hinterland on the north. They are young, aggressive, and united in their hostility to Ontario.

The variations within so large a region cannot, of course, be overlooked in any study of the imagination, especially where the chief feature to which the imagination must respond is the land itself. The climate and topography of the foothills area of southwestern Alberta, for example, must have been both physically and imaginatively less inhospitable to a British or "Eastern" settler than the flatlands of the Regina plains. Geographers' descriptions of the prairie are all too detailed and too technical for present purposes, but some rough idea of the main prairie zones may be helpful.[7] The prairie consists, as Captain John Palliser noted in 1857, of three distinct levels or steppes, sloping gradually north-eastward from the Rockies in southern Alberta to the Hudson's Bay basin. The high plains south of Calgary are at an altitude of over 3000 feet; and central portions of Manitoba, the dry bed of ancient, glacial Lake Agassiz, are less than 1000 feet above sea level. More significant for the traders and settlers has been the arrangement of typical vegetation, depending more on conditions of soil and precipitation than on altitude or latitude. Skirting the true bushland of the Laurentian Shield to the east, the taiga to the north and the Rockies to the west, there lies a crescent of lightly and irregularly wooded "park belt," averaging about two hundred miles in width and arching from southern Manitoba through central Saskatchewan and Alberta

to the mountains. Enclosed by this park belt, and occupying a little of southern Manitoba, all of southern Saskatchewan and most of southern Alberta are the grasslands, the "true" prairie, what W.O. Mitchell's characters call the "bald-headed." Generalizations about the prairie can be assumed to refer especially to the high, flat, dry grasslands as the extreme, and for that reason, most typical landscape, but distinctions among these areas as settings will be made where they seem important to the interpretation of a literary response to the land.

The prairie, for present purposes, is also taken to be essentially rural. Recognizably urban fiction does not develop until quite late, and then it bears little upon the progress of man's relations with the prairie. Since the cities in prairie fiction appear much like cities anywhere, such admittedly excellent novels as John Marlyn's Under the Ribs of Death, Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice, and Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal will be given no separate consideration.

Mrs. McClung's woman in the silk dress could, of course, have been confronting any wilderness. D.G. Jones, in his Butterfly on Rock, identifies the problem of an overpowering environment as the general lot of the Canadian imagination.[8] It might be asked how this woman's struggle differs from that of Margaret Atwood's farmer in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," or of the trapper in Earle Birney's "Bushed," or of Susannah Moodie back in Upper Canada fifty years earlier. Mrs. McClung does not suggest any answer, merely dismisses the woman as "not the type that makes a pioneer," but there is evidence that the prairie with its openness and isolation does make its own peculiar assault on the civilized mind. Because of the strange topography, this woman's

experience of pioneering made unpredictable demands upon her sense of order. As Robert Kroetsch says of even the more settled prairie of today, "The western landscape is one without boundaries quite often. So you have the experience within a kind of chaos, yet you have to order it somehow to survive."[9] Whether or not the "chaos" to which Kroetsch refers is like the environment of Atwood's pioneer, "not an absence of order / But an ordered absence," the desire to order it is both heightened and frustrated by the impact that the simple and gigantic forms of the prairie landscape have upon the imagination. In many respects the westerner's imaginative struggle is peculiar to the prairie environment, and it can be traced in the fiction of the prairies, as a recurrent theme and as something in which the authors themselves are directly engaged.

First Impressions

Not surprisingly, the earliest responses to the prairies, verbal or otherwise, were non-literary. For the most part they were devoid of any conscious aesthetic intent, but they reveal much, both about the land itself and about the culture of the English-speaking people who came to claim it--essentially the two disparate elements which the western imagination was obliged, somehow, to reconcile. Travellers like W.F. Butler were responding to the prairie in its most complete, undisturbed state. And from the journals of Anthony Henday in 1754 to the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 we can see consistently if implicitly the cultural patterns British and Canadian settlers attempted to impose upon the land. The collision between culture and natural setting was

unusually violent (the disaster of the drought years is only the most obvious effect), more violent, for example, than it was for settlers of some smaller ethnic groups. As a result, the imagination, in its struggle to humanize an unfamiliar and awesome environment could make little use of familiar cultural patterns. It found itself unhoused, as it were, and sought shelter in a variety of ways.

In the journals of the early explorers, traders and travellers, descriptions of the new landscape are not as common as one might expect. These men had other things on their minds, of course, but since they took time to describe scenes of another sort, the very dearth of description is significant. This terrain was not what they had come to know as picturesque; they had no ready paradigms for describing it, and may even have had difficulty observing it very carefully. In this respect they had something in common with the earliest settlers who, to judge from their diaries, kept their eyes firmly fixed on the immediate menace of mudholes, mosquitoes, and the occasional Indian. There are impressions of the prairie recorded as early as Kelsey's journal in the late Seventeenth Century, but they are chiefly remarkable for an absence of imaginative stirring. The explorers and fur traders saw the plains in a severely utilitarian way. Descriptions in their journals concern mainly the means of survival and resources useful to the fur trade. Anthony Henday, the first white man to cross the Canadian prairie, records his emergence onto the true prairie in what is now north-central Saskatchewan in the summer of 1754 with the following terse journal entry:

Aug 30. Friday. Left the Asinepoet Indians, and travelled N.W. 10 miles. Level Barren land, not one stick of wood to be seen, & no water to drink.[10]

Henday's entry could serve as a model for one class of non-response to the landscape: the prairie as unusable space. Alexander Mackenzie's journals of his Voyages in 1789 and 1793 are much fuller and have more pretensions to style, despite his modest disclaimers, yet his description of the plains country shows the same utilitarian concerns:

> The country between this [Assindboine] and the Red River, is almost a continual plain to the Mississoury. The soil is sand and gravel, with a slight intermixture of earth, and produces short grass. Trees are very rare; nor are there on the banks of the river sufficient, except in particular spots, to build houses and supply fire-wood for the trading establishments. . . .[11]

Mackenzie at least recognizes the utility of the land: he understands the vital connection between the buffalo and the fur trade, but he offers an inventory rather than a description.

It is not until he reaches the park belt country of northern Manitoba that Mac enzie is stirred by the landscape. Here he describes a point on the Sevan, Clearwater, or Pelican River:

> This precipice, which rises upwards of a thousand feet above the plain beneath it, commands a most extensive, romantic, and ravishing prospect . . . . a most beautiful intermixture of wood and lawn . . . . stately forests, relieved by promontories of the finest verdure.[12]

Mackenzie's two descriptions make an interesting comparison. The park belt scenery is obviously reminiscent of his native Scotland, but from the terms he uses, "romantic","ravishing","wood","lawn","stately forests," terms which might have come from an eighteenth-century topographical

poem, it is clear that the scene lends itself to familiar conventions of landscape description. It is therefore easier to see, respond to, and record. In Mackenzie's defence it should be added that the first painters and novelists to record the west suffered from the same limitation without being any more aware of it.

Elsewhere in the Voyages we can see that Mackenzie's tendency to impose his own cultural patterns on what he found was not confined to the landscape. At one point he explains the failure of the missionaries to "civilise" the Indians, suggesting a program which looks very familiar today:

> They should have begun their work by teaching some of those useful arts which are the inlets of knowledge, and lead the mind by degrees to objects of higher comprehension. Agriculture, so formed to fix and combine society, and so preparatory to objects of superior consideration, should have been the first thing introduced among a savage people: it attaches the wandering tribe to that spot where it adds so much to their comforts; while it gives them a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds.[13]

The passage is rich in irony, especially so because it could be a description of our patient misunderstanding of the native people to the present day. The difference is in his absolute, unashamed faith that our society based upon property and possession leads the mind "by degrees to objects of higher comprehension." He would not notice that the Indians could neither comprehend the goals of such a society nor understand how the rules of property could apply to the earth itself, because he could not see that their habits constituted a culture any more than he could see that the shapes of the prairie constituted a

"landscape." MacKenzie was an apt representative of the culture which was to dominate the settlement of the West.

Until the mid-Nineteenth Century, the central prairie region was little known to white men. Most commerce was along the North Saskatchewan River, which skirted the park belt, chiefly because that was where the buffalo, the fur-bearing animals, and the means of transportation coincided. John Palliser, on his combined surveying and sporting expedition of 1857-60 was among the first to explore the southern Canadian prairie. Because his purpose was to evaluate the potential of the land for colonization, his accounts are not richly descriptive, but he is remembered for defining the area which still bears his name:

> This central desert extends, however, but a short way into the British territory, forming a triangle, having for its base the 49th parallel from longitude 100° to 114° W., and with its apex reaching to the 52nd parallel of latitude.[14]

This is the well-known "Palliser Triangle," roughly the area described earlier as the short-grass or "true" prairie, an area, Palliser said, "which can never be expected to become occupied by settlers."[15] His gloomy prognosis is quite understandable; he knew as little about dry-land farming as the men who later settled that area and watched the top-soil blow away during the 1920's and 1930's. Now that suitable implements and techniques have been developed, the "Triangle" is one of the most successful grain-growing areas in Canada.

Attempts at a more imaginative response to the new land began to appear later in the Nineteenth Century. Sir William F. Butler was the first eloquent prairie traveller. His <u>The Great Lone Land</u> is an account of his tour of the West in 1870-71, and the time may be significant.

Butler was writing late enough to have read earlier accounts of the American West and quite possibly of the Canadian West. His impressions may have depended to some extent upon romantic traditions, particularly for the promise of courageous adventure implicit in his descriptions. A thirst for adventure was his declared motive for coming to the West, though his mission for this particular tour was ostensibly to report upon conditions prevailing among native tribes in the North West Territories. His mention of "the much-coveted passage to the longsought treasures of the old realms of Cathay" (pp. 199) suggests the first informing myth to possess the American people with regard to their own West, as described by Henry Nash Smith in his Virgin Land. Butler still regards the prairie as that passage, and this clearly adds to the glamour of his tour. In his attempts to explain the imaginative appeal of the plains, he returns consistently to the effects of space, the imposing aspect of the sky, the unexpected wild beauty of the land itself, and especially the silence, loneliness and isolation he experienced:

> The great ocean itself does not present more infinite variety than does this prairie-ocean of which we speak. In winter, a dazzling surface of purest snow; in early summer, a vast expanse of grass and pale pink roses; in autumn too often a wild sea of raging fire. No ocean of water in the world can vie with its gorgeous sunsets; no solitude can equal the loneliness of a night-shadowed prairie; one feels the stillness, and hears the silence, the wail of the prowling wolf makes the voice of solitude audible, the stars look down through infinite silence upon a silence almost as intense.[16]

To give a form to the totally unfamiliar mixture of impressions, Butler has chosen the more familiar seascape, which would have been nearer to

the experience of most of his intended British readership. The effectiveness of the comparison is evident from the persistence of the prairie-sea metaphor through the works of Stringer, Grove, Ross, McCourt, Kreisel, Kroetsch (the list could be extended indefinitely) as a way of drawing upon the literary experience, and often only the literary experience, of their Canadian readers. The imagination seems to be more at home with what has already been rendered imaginatively.

In phrases such as "feels the stillness" and "hears the silence," Butler's description testifies, like most later descriptions, to the elusiveness of the power this landscape exerts upon the imagination. Even the preoccupation of prairie novelists with "the impact of the landscape upon the mind," to use Kreisel's phrase, is less the indulgence of a satisfying theme than the sign of a continual and unfinished struggle. The power is elusive but in the more extensive descriptions certain elements recur, like the common impression that the vastness of the plains is at once enticing and threatening to the civilized imagination. Butler emphasizes the beauty, but also the unpleasant or menacing elements such as the snow, grass fires, wolves, and loneliness. Surprisingly few of the descriptions dwell upon the routine discomforts of the climate, the bitter cold and blizzards in winter, the withering heat and persistent, dessicating wind in summer, to say nothing of periodic hazards of hail, cyclones, drought and dust storms. Yet there is some ambivalence of feeling about the essential features of the prairie. The openness of prospect which frees the spirit also threatens it with the loss of security, order, and ultimately all human meaning! Butler refers to a French writer who has said that "the sense

of this utter negation of life, this complete absence of history, has struck him with a loneliness oppressive and sometimes terrible in its intensity."[17] Butler denies any such feeling in himself, yet a few pages later he admits to feeling uncomfortably exposed to all those things inside as well as outside himself from which settled society normally protects an individual. "So, lying down that night for the first time with all this before me," he writes, "I felt as one who had to face not a few of those things from which is evolved that strange mystery called death, and looking out into the vague dark immensity around me, saw in it the gloomy shapes and shadowy outlines of the bygone which memory hides but to produce at such times."[18] A menace undefined is potentially infinite, and it may be that the lack of clear definition in the prairie landscape is a part of its evocative power. For a robust adventurer like Butler the physical hardships can be accepted more readily than the uneasiness in the presence of mysterious and intangible shapes the immensity suggests to his imagination.

The prairie exposes him, above all, to disquieting levels of his own consciousness. This mirroring effect becomes almost as prominent in the later fiction of the prairie as it is in the sea stories of Conrad, to return to Butler's original metaphor. D.G. Jones describes it well in Butterfly on Rock: he is considering Canadian literature as a whole, but his argument applies particularly well to prairie fiction from, say, 1920 to the present.

> The land is both condition and reflection, both mirror and fact. Particularly in literature it comes to symbolize elements of our inner life. As these elements are ignored or suppressed, the land becomes a symbol of the unconscious,

> the irrational in the lives of the characters. And the more powerful those elements are, the more disturbing and demonic the land and the figures associated with it may become.[19]

One would only have to impose a severe Calvinist outlook on Butler's night reflections to produce the grim almost judgmental environment of Mrs. Bentley's diary in As For Me and My House, even without the drought.

Only a decade after Butler's tour of "The Great Lone Land" a traveller from Canada, George Munro Grant, edited a book called Picturesque Canada which includes a section on the North West Territories.[20] The book was obviously meant to stimulate national pride if not immigration; its drawings are romantically embellished and its text sparkles with optimism about the West. Yet Grant records a reaction to the space and solitude of the open prairie very much like Butler's:

> Here, for day after day, the traveller moves like a speck on the surface of an unbroken and apparently interminable level expanse. Nothing intervenes between him and the horizon, and let him gallop as fast as he will the horizon appears ever the same and at the same distance from him. All the while, too, he sees no living thing on the earth or in the air. Silence as of the grave reigns supreme from morning to night. The spirits of the most buoyant traveller sink as he rides deeper and deeper into this terrible silence, unless he has learned to commune with the Eternal.[21]

It is clear that Grant's galloping horseman is not suffering from boredom. Nor is it mainly the emptiness which is bothering him (the scene is actually teeming with life, as any practised eye could see), but rather the sparseness of detail in the foreground which exposes him to an awareness of himself in a larger perspective of horizon and sky. He finds the silence "terrible" because the configurations of the land itself help to induce reflections upon death and eternity. As Wallace

Stegner says in Wolf Willow, there is something suggestive of eternity in the "hugeness of simple forms" which make up the prairie landscape.[22] They reduce man and his temporal progress to a speck on an apparently interminable expanse.

This paradox of freedom and exposure has complicated the idea of the frontier West in North American consciousness as a whole. Jack Warwick, in The Long Journey, explains how in French Canadian literature that paradox is embodied as a dramatic tension in the figure of the voyageur, torn between the lure of anarchic freedom in the pays d'en haut and the commitments and attractions of ordered social existence in the settlements. Henry Nash Smith had earlier identified the corresponding figure in American tradition as the backwoods hunter-settler, typified by Daniel Boone, who was variously mythologized as a powerful civilizing agent carving the state of Kentucky out of the wilderness and as a man addicted to the savage way of life, who fled before the near approach of anything like civilization. Cooper's Leatherstocking and the best of his literary descendants carried on the tradition. They balanced the two impulses excited by the virgin land, to preserve the wild freedom of it and to impose a better human order on it. It may be one of the weaknesses of Canadian prairie fiction in English that it has developed no such figure, probably because it has been largely a fiction of settlement rather than exploration and adventure, where values of order outweigh those of freedom, and man's whole design is to impose his personality upon nature. The aspect of freedom remains embodied in the land, as promise and as threat. The literature reflects a different characteristic balance of the two impulses in the Canadian West.

Consider even a romantic figure like Butler, who writes that he cannot long endure "constraint within the boundaries of civilized life,"[23] while engaged in a survey to determine the best means of maintaining law and order among the native tribes.

The same elusive and ambivalent power seems to haunt later prairie travellers. Some of the features basic to the meeting of man and prairie become clearer and sharper when these accounts of early visitors are juxtaposed with a recent account by a writer who has lived on the prairie. Wallace Stegner's Wolf Willow (1955) describes his return to the area of southern Saskatchewan where he had spent part of his early childhood. Notice that his description includes the familiar sea metaphor as well as the feeling of an imagination powerfully moved but not entirely at ease with its own freedom.

> The plain spreads southward below the Trans-Canada Highway, an ocean of wind-troubled grass and grain. It has its remembered textures: winter wheat heavily headed, scoured and shadowed as if schools of fish move in it; spring wheat with its young seed-rows as precise as combings in a boy's wet hair; gray-brown summer fallow with the weeds disked under; and grass, the marvellous curly prairie wool tight to the earth's skin, straining the wind as the wheat does, but in its own way, secretly.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> On that monotonous surface with its occasional ship-like farm, its atolls of shelter-belt trees, its level ring of horizon, there is little to interrupt the eye. Roads run straight between parallel lines of fence until they intersect the circle of the horizon. It is a landscape of circles, radii, perspective exercises -- a country of geometry.
>
> Across its empty miles pours the pushing and shouldering wind, a thing you tighten into as a trout tightens into fast water. It is a grassy, clean, exciting wind, with the smell of distance in it. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It is a long way from characterless; "overpowering"

> would be a better word, For over the segmented circle of earth is domed the biggest sky anywhere, which on days like this sheds down on range and wheat and summer fallow a light to set a painter wild, a light pure, glareless, and transparent.[24]

In the intervening eighty-five years since Butler's journey the prairie has been settled and to some extent pervaded by human associations, enough that Stegner can attach to it human metaphors of skin and hair. But the prairie remains essentially unchanged by settlement; it is still an "ocean", responsive only to the will of the elements, and within the ocean metaphor the farms are not even islands, but "ships", with all the fragility and impermanence, the transient quality, implied by the image. The entire panorama does not include a single human being. The "overpowering" quality may be partly a result of the observer being characteristically alone in the landscape, as he is in so much of the fiction. The prairie seems to deny the permanent signs of human society which could reassure the observer that he is not alone in the face of the huge, eternal forms of land and sky. The best that man has managed, the lines of road and fence, are as bloodless as geometry.

More than any of the earlier writers, Stegner emphasizes how powerfully the imagination is stirred yet how little it can seize upon in trying to assimilate the strongly felt impression. Imagery is difficult when the stimulus is reduced almost to the abstraction of geometry. Travellers and settlers from Britain and Ontario may have experienced difficulty responding imaginatively to a landscape whose characteristic features evoked strong but ambivalent feelings. Their difficulty must have been aggravated by the fact that its elements hardly constitute a "landscape" in any sense familiar to them. Grant's

impression that there is nothing between him and the horizon is a typical response to the paucity of visual detail a prairie offers. Even fairly articulate travellers often proved uncommunicative about the true prairie. Dr. Cheadle and Viscount Milton, for example, in their The North-West Passage by Land of 1865 offer no description of the terrain until they reach the park belt on the North Saskatchewan, at which point, like Mackenzie, they begin to see landscapes, "not indeed grandly picturesque, but rich and beautiful."[25] The fiction frequently bears witness to the same spare, incomplete visual quality of the plains. Sinclair Ross's narrator, Mrs. Bentley, remarks that "only a great artist could ever paint the prairie, the vacancy and stillness of it, the bare essentials of a landscape, sky and earth."[26] W.O. Mitchell echoes the latter phrase in the first two lines of Who Has Seen the Wind: "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky -- Saskatchewan prairie."[27] Further afield, Willa Cather has her narrator, Jim Burden, in My Antonia remark when he first sees the similar terrain of Nebraska, "There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made."[28] Burden's remark emphasizes the incomplete or unfinished quality implied in the other descriptions while Mitchell's "lowest common denominator," like Stegner's "landscape of circles, radii, perspective exercises" shows how the mind is tempted by the open, inconclusive forms to impose some pattern of its own, even if it must go to the level of mathematical abstraction. Perspective too, as Marshall McLuhan explains, is an artificial contrivance, but it provides an observer with at least a point of view and a rudimentary way of ordering what he sees.

General Cultural Response

Let us next consider the settlers' general cultural response to the new environment which made such a strong impression on his imagination. The first British and Canadian settlers on the plains must have found the lack of familiar form and detail in the landscape equalled by the lack of cultural traditions developed to express man's response to these surroundings. They found no suitable conventions of landscape painting or description, very little in the way of architecture, song, story, or social custom, and what there was among the Indians they rejected. There was, in fact, a developing model for economic and social adaptation to the plains among the Metis people, but the immigrants despised and did their best to eradicate it. The folklore of the native Indian was practically inaccessible even had they cared about it. The immigrant mind was left very much on its own, exposed to its powerful new environment. As a result the first settlers faced a struggle for imaginative survival analogous to and never entirely separate from their struggle for physical survival. Both were implied in, both essential to, their cultural adaptation to the new environment, and it was in the interests of both that the pioneer generation set about, sometimes wisely but too often unwisely, imposing a culture upon the land. As W.L. Morton says about the accomplished cultivation of southern Manitoba, "It was at once a material reshaping of the land, and also a firm and confident expression of a way of life, rarely defined, but well understood."[29] Even in Manitoba, where the confidence was not misplaced in a material sense, the broader cultural adjustment was the more difficult part to accomplish, as the literature continually gives evidence. Margaret

Laurence says that "survival" is the inevitable theme of a writer coming from a Manitoba Scots pioneer background such as hers: "survival not just in the physical sense, but the survival of some human dignity and in the end the survival of some human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others."[30] Survival of the essential humanity of which Mrs. Laurence writes depends to a great extent upon the ability of the imagination to humanize the naturally austere and often hostile surroundings.

Quite naturally the first resort of the pioneers coming from established societies was, as Morton suggests, to impose familiar cultural patterns upon the new land in everything from methods of cultivation to literary forms. One striking instance is provided by the Methodist missionary Egerton Ryerson Young, when he describes his first glimpse of old Fort Garry in 1863, reached after several days of travel over uninhabited prairie:

> We travelled on through the French half-breed settlement, until we reached the quaint, old fashioned, medieval fortress of Fort Garry. Strangely out of place did it seem to us. As we first looked up at its massive walls and turrets and bastions it seemed as though some freak of nature, or magic wand had suddenly transported it from some old historic European nation and dropped it down amid the luxuriant grasses and brilliant flowers of this wild prairie country.[31]

Significantly the Metis settlement does not seem out of place to him, while the architecture and air of the fortress testify to civilized man's response (or lack of response) to the plains, a clinging to the familiar, however incongruous in the new setting. Quite as significantly Young never sees the shadow of an analogy between the fortress and his

Plate 1: "The Settlers, Settled," Manitoba Archives, printed in Frank Rasky, The Taming of the Canadian West (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967). pp. 102-103.

missionary work among the Indians. This sort of cultural conservatism is common in the literature of the plains, first as a trait of the fiction and later as a perennial theme. Grove develops the theme extensively in Our Daily Bread and Fruits of the Earth, and Fort Garry as the Rev. Young saw it could even be taken as a distant ancestor of the grand house Abe Spalding builds in Fruits of the Earth to dominate the prairie, to proclaim his dominion.

Houses, as Susan Jackel demonstrates in her "The House on the Prairies," acquire a strong symbolic significance in prairie fiction.[32] As the first creative assertion of the inhabitants and as the most immediate defence against the environment, they are also a useful index of the cultural adaptation of various groups of settlers. The British and Canadian settlers, whenever they could manage to, were inclined to build imposing, slightly impractical houses, probably because they embodied a style of life to which they hoped to rise by coming to the free land of the West. The prairie is everywhere dotted with tall, windswept "upper Canada" looking houses, not only in the older areas settled heavily by direct immigration from Ontario, but also in the more westerly and later settled areas. Frank Rasky, in his The Taming of the Canadian West prints the picture in Plate 1, of a Manitoba farm in the 1890's with the owners sitting before it in state, asserting by their demeanor the way of life they believed they were establishing on the prairie. As Rasky says, "Dressed in their Sunday finest, posed like any English gentlefolk outside a country mansion, these Westerners sat for their portrait in the front yard of their Manitoba 'estate'."[33] The proud couple seems as innocent of the fallen plaster exposing the

logs on the end wall of their house as they are of the incongruity of their whole situation.

There are some indications that, like their houses, the broad cultural patterns of the British and Canadian immigrants were unusually ill-adapted to prairie conditions. The same determination which brought them out in force seems to have made them insensitive to the disparity between what they brought with them and what they found there. Compared to the Metis or the smaller ethnic groups from eastern Europe, for example, the typical spatial arrangements they imposed on the landscape, and the social organization which accompanied them show a proneness to ignore and to work against the natural characteristics of the new environment. The Metis of Red River settled narrow strips of land extending two miles back from the river in the manner the French had adopted in Quebec two centuries earlier. All shared the river front as a source of water and as the natural means of communication, and the dwellings were kept conveniently, sociably near to each other. This survey also had the advantage that the Hudson's Bay Company allowed an additional two mile strip beyond the river lots as a hay meadow informally consigned to the use of the farmer.[34] It was in one of these hay meadows in 1869 that Louis Riel made his historic gesture of placing his moccasin on the chain of the surveyors sent to redivide the land.[35] The Metis were willing to be guided by the economics as well as by the geography of the land, dividing their time (not always too effectively) between the rude sort of farming possible there and hunting or freighting for the fur companies. Their buffalo hunting was essential to the provisioning of the fur "brigade," which could never

have served the remote trading posts without a portable concentrated food supply like pemmican. The earliest of the "Selkirk" settlers were forced, whether they liked it or not, to depend on these same mixed activities for some years after they began breaking their land for cultivation.[36] The Metis allowed this mixed mode of subsistence to shape their social organization and to provide their ideals in life. As Douglas Hill says in The Opening of the Canadian West, "To the Metis, running the buffalo was a sport and a way of life, symbolizing their freedom and their mastery of the plains. The hunt also gave solidarity and organization to the Metis communities. To this social structure came laws to govern both the hunt and the community life -- and from it came their justifiable sense of being the true children of the West, a separate nation."[37] Rather than learn from this people, the settlers despised their way of life, probably because it did not tend toward either wealth or security. Milton and Cheadle reveal a blindness to the value of the Metis adaptation which was probably typical. They dismiss the mixed-blood as a colorful but worthless sort of fellow, without seeming to notice that throughout their long and celebrated tour of the West their lives depended continually on the special accomplishments of their Metis guides and hunters.

The Canadian government survey, by contrast, seemed well designed to create hardship by ignoring the natural features of the land. It divided the west into townships six miles square containing thirty-six sections of 640 acres, each in turn divided into 160 acre quarter-sections, all without regard to fertility, access to water, or natural lines of communication. This was the American practice adopted

apparently on the assumption that 160 acres would support a farm family.[38] In the West, where modes of agriculture dictated larger farm units, it created even greater dispersal of the settlers. On the short grass range, for example, a hundred acres was often found to be sufficient to pasture only one steer.[39] The isolation and lack of community was further aggravated by the free homestead policy framed in the Dominion Lands Act of 1872. "Free homesteads could be established only on even-numbered sections. The odd numbers were otherwise reserved. Two odd sections in each township were to be sold, when needed, as an endowment for schools. One and three-quarters sections of each township (and an extra section in every fifth township) went as H.B.C. reserve land. In some areas, Indian (and Metis) reserves claimed a share. Much of the remainder was set aside for the C.P.R. . . . ."[40] Obviously the recipients of the "free" quarter sections were expected to do the work which would make the C.P.R. and Hudson's Bay sections valuable -- then buy them.

One effect of this land policy was to broadcast a scanty population along the routes of the railways, frequently out of convenient range of neighbours and thoroughly exposed to the intimidating and often dangerous isolation of the empty prairie. And this in a climate where the unremitting severity of the weather could inhibit travel for long periods. A second effect was to commit the settlers to a rectangular world, and they went on to sustain that motif as they brought the land under cultivation. W.L. Morton describes this process in his "Seeing an Unliterary Landscape."

> Very quickly, . . . in fact in less than three generations for the most part, the elegant undress of the wild landscape of poplar bluff and meadow had given way to the prim and level square fields made by the plough.
>
> The new landscape was that standard in North America, the homestead with shelter bluff, square white house and long red barn . . . . Around the homestead the fields and pastures spread out to the fenced limits of the farm, usually the road allowances. They were square or oblong, but always rectangular in response to the insistent demand of the plough that it turn full, square furrows when at work.[41]

The utilitarian geometry of the fields was extended beyond any material need, to become "a cultural as well as a material landscape" as Morton says, and it had its larger scale in the townships, school districts, electoral districts, and its smaller scale in the town lot, fenced and hedged on a rectangular grid of streets usually responsive to the railroad tracks rather than any of the natural topography. Another characteristic Morton's description suggests is the enclosure and isolation inherent in the fencing and hedging. It was the most natural practice for the individualistic West-Europeans but not necessarily the best way of living with the already isolating conditions of the pioneer West, as some of the less individualistic ethnic groups demonstrated. The Mennonites came to southern Manitoba in large groups, often entire villages, cooperating to arrange their removal and arrival and to help the villagers establish themselves on the land.[42] They cultivated their farms cooperatively at first, living in villages rather than scattered across the prairie. George Grant's typically Canadian reaction to their settlements was to remark upon them without apparently seeing the advantages of their method:

> One street of steep-roofed, low-walled houses, with an old-country air of pervading quiet and uniform old-country look about the architecture, describes them all. There are about eighty of these villages in the Reserve. The farms are innocent alike of fences and of buildings. Each village has its herdsman, who goes out daily with the cattle. The husbandmen live in the village, submitting to the inconvenience of distance from their work, in order the better to preserve their language, religion and customs, and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse. To a stranger these would not appear to be very great.[43]

In 1882 the Mennonites' desire to "preserve their language, religion and customs" would not have been thought entirely consistent with good citizenship. The Mennonites resembled the Metis in their practice of handling locally and communally all matters of property, justice, religion, culture and sociability. And though Grant sees that they have prospered partly because they "at once accommodated themselves to the climate and all the material conditions" of the new land, he can never be more than good-naturedly condescending toward their achievement. He is repelled by their living habits, including their low houses of timber frame and sun-dried bricks which must have proven serviceable in the previous land of their adoption, the Russian steppes.

Where the enclosures of the Mennonite villages or the extended water-front community of the Metis would tend to bind together, the typical North American arrangements would tend to separate and confine, to shut out all society along with the threatening environment. In the fiction, Grove explores the effects of this shutting out in the figure of Abe Spalding in Fruits of the Earth. Spalding follows the standard pattern Morton describes, in order to assert his will over the land, but once his aim is achieved he recognizes its defensive and isolating qualities: "More and more the windbreak surrounding his yard seemed to

be a rampart which, without knowing it, he had erected to keep out a hostile world."[44] He realizes too late that by shutting this world out he has been shutting himself in, psychically, that he can no longer touch the people who are dear to him. Dorothy Livesay recalls the effects of a similar kind of isolation in a reminiscence of her Winnipeg childhood. Her father, a reader of the classics, with a "passion" for building fences, made his home and garden a model of order and seclusion where the children were scarcely allowed to play. Miss Livesay describes her first awakening to the prairie beyond the fences:

> For the first time I was really lifted from the earth to see the sky itself: a wide blue sky extending over the prairie like a winged bird, dropping soft feathers of light onto the horizon. And I saw the horizon; I saw its farther shores. From that day onward I had a different feeling about my father's house -- the small white clapboard house, the brown fence railings, the boundaried street -- these were no longer the hedge to keep me home. These had been like fetters holding me down.[45]

A stubborn cultural conservatism can be seen running from the settler's rectangular world to the classical scholar's passion for fences; both deny the natural environment, and the cultural consequences are similar. If the imagination encountering the untracked prairie could be said to have been "unhoused," the first phases of the broad cultural adaptation could be likened to sheltering in impractical older houses. Many of them would have been better left abandoned, like the grand, deserted house which inspired Grove with the theme of Fruits of the Earth.

Artistic and Literary Expression

Direct aesthetic treatment of the plains also began in a partly

involuntary tendency to ignore the character of the land and to impose upon it preconceptions or sometimes simply irrelevant patterns. Writers like R.M. Ballantyne and J.E. Collins gave the prairie a distinctly Walter Scott or Fenimore Cooper cast, and they had their counterparts among the painters who came out in surprising numbers with various expeditions and on their own. Paul Kane is probably the most respected of the early painters to visit the prairie, and his response to it is conveniently accessible both in his paintings and verbally in Wanderings of an Artist, the account of his tour of the west in 1847-48. Laurence Burpee's introduction to a recent edition of Wanderings describes Kane as having quite naturally "seen through European eyes" despite his having grown up in Ontario. Burpee quotes Charles W. Jeffreys' assessment of Kane's western scenes:

> "Trained abroad, he naturally adopted the European art traditions of his time. Consequently we see in his pictures of the North-West not the brilliant sunlight of the high prairie country and the foothills, nor the pure, intense colour of the north; we see instead the dull, brown tone of the Middle Europe of his day. The topography may be North American, but the atmosphere both physical and mental, which bathes the scene is essentially European."[46]

As early as 1877, Nicholas Flood Davin had identified these qualities in Kane's work as the "influence of the conventions of the Romantic school."[47] J. Russell Harper in his Painting in Canada points out other specifically romantic and exotic features of Kane's style:

> Kane's is a romantic and idealized world. He painted the grass of the wildest regions trimmed like an English greensward. Trading boats descending the Saskatchewan have the dignity of Roman galleys, and buffalo hunts are like wonderful

Plate 2: Paul Kane, "Red River Settlement," Royal Ontario Museum, printed in 150 Years of Art in Manitoba (Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970), p. 29.

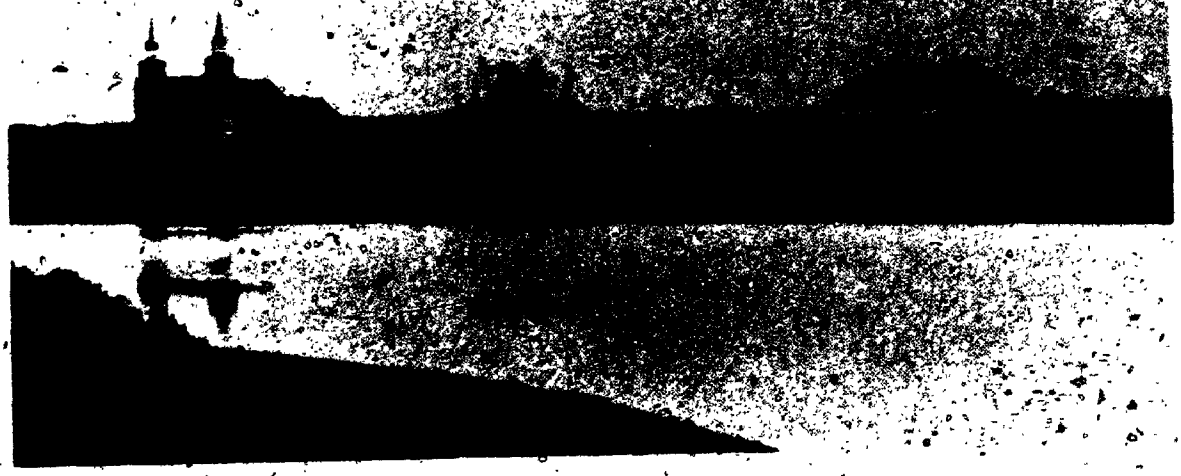


Plate 3: Cathedral of St. Boniface, from H.L. Hime, Photographs Taken at Lord Selkirk's Settlement on the River of the North (London, 1860), printed in 150 Years of Art in Manitoba (Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970), p. 32.

> tableaux on some gigantic stage. His lithe, graceful horses are sired by some highly bred blood strain. The stiffly posed warrior chieftans have a noble bearing. Sometimes he uses focussing light and at other times decorative sky effects.[48]

These comments, which could easily be adapted to describe the work of the early novelists, indicate the limited fitness of Kane's technique for portraying the distinctive characteristics of the prairie landscape. Had Kane's limitations been only in the technical craft of the painter, they would bear only slightly on the ordinary pioneer's problem of cultural adjustment, but Kane appears to have painted the prairie as he saw it. His first description of the Red River country as he entered it in 1846 agrees substantially with his painting of the prospect near St. Boniface Cathedral. (See Plates 2 and 3) "The country here is not very beautiful; a dead level plain with very little timber, the landscape wearing more the appearance of the cultivated farms of the old country with scarcely a stick or stump upon it."[49] This is Kane's only mention of flat prairie country, and his failure to see beauty in it, together with his not very apt comparison with old country farm land suggest that not only his techniques of expression but his perception had been shaped by the conventions in which he was trained and by the landscape he was accustomed to. The settlers must have been similarly handicapped in their attempts to see the new land, as one might gather from the paucity of comment on the topography to be found in their diaries. Like Kane and the other travellers, they usually become articulate only after they reach the park belt, a terrain much nearer to what they have been used to.

Fiction writers of the Nineteenth Century tended to do to the experience of the West what the painters did to the landscape. These early stories, beginning with Alexander Begg's Dot it Down in 1871, are surprisingly varied, but with few exceptions they all follow recognisable formulae embellished with a few western details. R.M. Ballantyne's Red Man's Revenge and A.C. Laut's Lords of the North, for example, are high adventure romance after the manner of Scott or Cooper. J.E. Collins' The Story of Louis Riel and Annette the Metis Spy are sensational romance more nearly akin to the "Dime Novels" of the American West. James Morton's Polson's Probation, and One Mistake, by the pseudonymous "Zero" attempt the mannered interchange of the nineteenth-century English novel, despite the fact that they have pathetically little to work with. In most stories the real prairie is virtually ignored. Ann Mercier and Violet Watt, for example, in their Red House by the Rockies, describe the Alberta foothills in the soft tones of an English romantic painter -- after clothing them tastefully in oak trees. Collins sets Lord Selkirk down (many years too early) in a very exotic Red River valley: "Here the 'tiger rose,' like some savage queen of beauty, rose to his knees and breathed her sultry balm in his face."[50] More often, as in the stories of Ballantyne and Laut, the prairie is a convenient wilderness against which to pit heroic courage, its hostility personified by the Indians who inhabit it. Like Fenimore Cooper, some of these writers had never seen the plains, of course, but those who had must have been kept, as the painters were, by conventions of their literary form or by their own habits of perception from giving it any vivid individuality as a setting.

One way of explaining this initial inability to perceive the land in settler, painter and writer is by saying that they needed a way of seeing the land in relation to man before it could take on meaningful shape and acquire significant detail. Casting it as a wilderness or as a mere commodity were two inadequate and largely short-lived attempts to do this. What they needed, in effect, was a myth, and a plausible one, to express their changed relationship to their environment. By the turn of the century the novelists had found one in the "garden of the world" idea, probably borrowed from that earlier phase of western American settlement Henry Nash Smith describes under this heading. It provided the writers with a way of ordering their imaginative perceptions of the prairie, and not surprisingly the natural setting begins to appear more clearly and more substantially in their work at this same time. The idea had some plausibility. After the depression of the 1890's the West was emerging into its greatest period of agricultural expansion. The railroads were opening up seemingly unlimited opportunities for grain farming. Cheap land, easy cultivation and buoyant markets were promising the wheat farmer swift prosperity. Historians as well as novelists spoke of the West in millennial terms.

Some of the settlers and, again, the painters, were ahead of the novelists in adopting the "garden" image of the West. As early as 1880 Nellie McClung's childish expectations were that "We would travel with the sun, until we came to that flower starred prairie where no stone would impede the plough; where strawberries would redden the oxen's fetlocks; where eight-hundred acres of rich black soil was waiting for us. . . ."[51] This illusion was probably the work of the railroads and the immigration

Plate 4: "The Virgin Prairie," wood engraving in George Munro Grant, Picturesque Canada (Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882), I, 277.

Plate 5: A Prairie Stream,'" wood engraving in George Munro Grant, Picturesque Canada (Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882), I, 285.

department, who would understandably foster such expectations.

The painters, too, seem to have developed this conception of the West considerably earlier than the writers, as the illustrations in Grant's Picturesque Canada (1882) reveal. The leading illustration, "Virgin Prairie," probably by the American artist Frederick B. Schell (his background may be significant considering the source of the garden idea) is typical. (See Plate 4) The picture represents the flatness of the land and the dramatic prominence of the sky very well, but the bouquet of flowers dominating the foreground and extending beyond the margins imposes a lushness of tone upon an otherwise awe-inspiring but austere prospect. The picture of a "A Prairie Stream," (see Plate 5) goes a little further to express the Edenic tone, entwining the trees -- themselves of an indefinite species -- with traceries of distinctly exotic foliage. The effect of the rounded margin is hard to assess precisely, but it seems to provide a completion to the vision without the need to let in all the bush or prairie which must extend beyond this stream. It has a dream-like self-containment very like the vision of the West encouraged by the text of the book.

In fiction, Ralph Connor's The Sky Pilot in 1899 can be taken as the beginning of a trend toward a garden view of the prairie which was to last for over twenty-five years. The lyric praise of farm life voiced by Arthur Stringer's Chaddy McKail in The Prairie Wife is typical of what can be found in fiction up to the mid-1920's.

> We're laboring to feed the world, since the world must have bread, and there's something satisfying and uplifting in the mere thought that we can answer to God, in the end, for our lives, no matter how raw and rude they may have been . . . .

> And at sunrise, when the prairie is thinly silvered with dew, when the tiny hammocks of spider webs swing a million sparkling webs strung with diamonds, when every blade of grass is a singing string of pearls, hymning to God on High for the birth of a golden day, I can feel my heart swell, and I'm so abundantly, so inexpressibly alive, alive to every finger-tip! Such space, such light, such distance.[52]

This, the archetypal garden, is the most common though not often the most convincing image of the prairie in the stories of Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer, the early R.J.C. Stead, and a host of less popular romancers of their time. Like Eden, their West has no past, only a present beginning when the settler arrives, and a better future. This was, of course, a time of boom and optimism, and for the writers at least, a time of agrarian ideals. The free, independent farmer is in their eyes the most productive citizen and likely to be the happiest and most virtuous, because of the ennobling effects of his honest labour and continual contact with nature. Nature is a divine order in almost the eighteenth-century sense, exacting harsh service of man but ultimately beneficent.

The predictable counterpart of this divine natural order is a trivial, corrupt or evil human order, evident whenever the city appears in fiction of this era. The Calgary of Stringer's prairie trilogy or of Stead's Cow Puncher, for example, and the cities of Nellie McClung's stories, are areas of exploitation and vice. The raw prairie cities of the boom years did lack many of the civilized refinements which are expected to compensate for the lack of wholesome country innocence, but these writers were also responding to the demands of a literary genre. They were producing a variety of sentimental romance which is permeated

with a quasi-pastoral assumption that the country is regenerative while the city is sinister and moribund.

The use of this recurrent garden motif in the art and the culture generally could be dismissed as simply another way of looking at the prairie without seeing it. To some extent, the imagination is not transforming the given reality but escaping from it. The dream quality is confirmed by the suddenness with which that dream turns to nightmare during the years of drought and depression which follow, yet the view of the prairie evident in this fiction has advantages over earlier views, and a certain claim to attention as a permanent feature of the prairie consciousness. If the insistent moral tone obscures some aspects of the environment, notably the less pleasant effects of isolation and hardship, it does highlight the peculiar inspirational qualities of the land and its promise, which are as undeniably real, if ordinarily more fleeting in their effect. This fiction is also true to the spirit of precarious optimism which was and to some extent remains, characteristic of the prairie settler.

The mid-1920's mark a watershed in prairie cultural development. In those years immigration virtually reached its equilibrium. The number of British immigrants who came to the prairies in 1926, for example, was about equal to the number who left.[53] The dream of settlement had, in many respects, been realized. Transportation, communication, and general amenities were improving. Settlers were prospering and expanding their acreage; mechanization was increasing their efficiency; the land was yielding generously except for some areas of southern Saskatchewan and Alberta where it was (ominously) beginning to blow

away. Wheat prices were high. Still, there was no millenium of the sort anticipated. A dream had become a prosaic reality. It must have been more than coincidence that in 1925 and 1926 there appeared the three novels usually regarded as heralding a new realism in prairie fiction: Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Grove's Settlers of the Marsh and R.J.C. Stead's Grain.

The techniques of this new fiction encouraged a more thorough representation of the prairie environment and way of life than can be found in any earlier fiction. The novels also show an increasing disillusionment with the romance of pioneering and the naive assumptions underlying it. In the work of Grove, Stead, and Ostenso, as there would later be in that of Ross, Stegner, McCourt, Mitchell and others, there is a realization that the means of physical and economic adaptation to the environment, though initally successful, had not automatically effected a cultural or imaginative adaptation. Rather, they had aggravated the original unfamiliarity with the land into a settled alienation by tending, in D.G. Jones's phrase, to exploit what they should have cultivated. Grove's Abe Spalding, as we have seen, is the classic case. He comes from Ontario with a determination to impose an entire way of life upon an apparently featureless tract of land. He succeeds in every measurable way, but suffers in proportion a gradual dehumanization. Dimly he recognizes that mechanization is isolating him from the land itself, yet he pursues his dream of a grand modern house. Ironically, the house creates the final barrier between Abe and his wife and family, because it is too late, too luxurious and too impersonal. That structure, which comes to represent Abe's ideal of mastery over

nature, he finally recognizes as an outward reflection of his inner condition, since his efforts to master the land have shut him off from others and from a great deal of himself. Here again Jones' analysis is useful when he says that Grove's heroes represent "the arrogant and aggressive masculine logos" of western civilization which attempts to tyrannize over nature, both external nature and the more spontaneous, irrational aspects of human nature.[54] These are the very aspects Abe cannot cope with in his growing family. Spalding's failure, seen in another way, is a failure of imagination, and one common to many other fictional pioneers. By fixing doggedly upon his own limited vision, he fails to assimilate the realities around him, and those realities when ignored become alien and threatening. He remains essentially a stranger in his own land.

Among Canadian painters, a spirit akin to that of the prairie realists of the mid-1920's can be recognized in the Group of Seven, but except for A.Y. Jackson and Lemoine Fitzgerald, they had little interest in painting the prairies. This is not true, however, of C.W. Jefferys, who was a forerunner of theirs in the pursuit of artistic nationalism. J. Russell Harper assigns considerable importance to Jefferys' annual visits to the prairies:

> His most significant canvases, Western Sunlight, Lost Mountain Lake and Prairie Trail (Art Gallery of Toronto), were painted from sketches made on these trips. He sought to discover the western landscape's real nature -- its distant horizons, the repetition of horizontal lines, subtle variations of colour in the foliage, and the clearness of the atmosphere. Later, Jefferys would preach the gospel of spruce and pine as a theme for Canadian painters. His vivid interpretations of the Prairies and his landscapes of other parts of Canada must have acted as powerful stimuli to members of the Group of Seven.[55]

The two paintings Harper mentions were done in 1911 and 1912, so again the painters seem to have anticipated the writers by a decade or more. For all the very striking realism of Jefferys' work, there is, in these paintings, no suggestion of alienation or the deterministic world-view found in the fiction. A nearer analogy to the mood of the fiction can be found in the slightly later work of immigrant painters such as Charles Comfort and Alex Musgrove. Comfort's Prairie Road (1925) presents the sparseness of the land and the domination of the sky very effectively, creating what might be called intensely clear air with an opaque sky. Comfort, interestingly enough, worked for a time with the wood engraving firm of Fred Brigden in Winnipeg, supplying illustrations for the Eaton's mail order catalogue, a publication which must have had incalculable effects on the visual tastes of prairie dwellers.[56] In Alex Musgrove's The Prairie Sentinel (See Plate 6) the familiar grain elevator appears to be surrounded by a flimsy and inadequate palisade which, like the title, suggests a civilized outpost which feels itself besieged in some indefinite way by the landscape. Perhaps the intuitions of the painters were surer. The novelists gradually come to see that the pioneer is cut off from nature not by an innate hostility in the land but by his own hostile frame of mind.

The views of the early realists in fiction might have encouraged a less exploitive approach to the land and prevented some later distress, even of a material sort, had they been widely shared. They do not appear to have been, and their publication in serious fiction was unlikely to spread them very quickly. The average farmer of that era had a grade five to grade eight education and little time for "impractical" men of

Plate 6: Alex Musgrove, "The Prairie Sentinel," The Bulman Group Ltd., printed in 150 Years of Art in Manitoba (Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970), p. 89.

letters.[57] The relative prosperity of the post-war years could have provided the leisure and the money for general cultural development which obviously lagged behind the physical development of the prairies. Instead, the imaginative failure to adapt to the plains was compounded by economic failure during the 1930's.

The Depression would have been especially disastrous on the prairies under any circumstances, accompanied as it was in so many districts by an almost unrelieved drought lasting from 1930 to 1938. But prairie farmers were rendered more vulnerable to both these dangers by practices of settlement and cultivation developed during the boom years. Many had mortgaged their original homesteads in order to put more land -- often sub-marginal land -- under cultivation for the sake of a bumper crop which would bring sudden prosperity. The economic depression, the plunging wheat prices from 1930 to 1933, made mortgages insupportable. Their techniques of cultivation, brought from areas of much higher rainfall, made the farmers especially vulnerable to the ravages of the drought. There was no concerted effort to guard against either of these dangers, despite the fact that the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments had both set up commissions to study the problems of dry-land farming as early as 1920, and that by 1926 more than 10,000 farms had been abandoned in Alberta.[58] The topsoil continued to blow through the 1930's until eventually some 18,000,000 acres of farm land were affected[59] and the prairies had lost some 247,000 people.[60]

James Gray, in his Men Against the Desert describes the long struggle, with the guidance and financing of the Prairie Farm Rehabi-

litation Administration, to reclaim the desert of the Palliser Triangle. When the PFRA was established in 1935, virtually nothing had been done. To correct the errors of past practices of settlement and cultivation, it was necessary to relocate farmers, returning some land to grass and creating community pastures, to develop farming methods such as strip farming and "trash farming" to conserve moisture, and windrowing of soil to reduce wind erosion. Implements with which to farm the dry prairie, like the discer and the blade cultivator, were developed as well as a new grass to hold the dry pasture lands from blowing away, Fairway crested wheat grass. The previous lack of dry-farming methods and implements is evidence that the settlers knew too little about their land, but there is further evidence that they cared too little as well. It was estimated that only one homesteader in three ever intended to become a farmer.[61] The others hoped to "prove up," sell out, and move on. The land was a commodity. The result of this and similar attitudes was that much of the land was deteriorating through neglect or exhausted by over-cropping before the ravages of drought, hail, rust and grasshoppers set in. The effects of such mismanagement would have been felt in the 1930's even without the depression or drought.[62]

Both nature's indifference and man's negligence are apparent in the fiction of the Depression period, as can be seen in the work of Sinclair Ross, Edward McCourt, Vera Lysenko, and in a different way, W.O. Mitchell. Especially in Ross's As For Me and My House, the most austere of the Depression novels, we see the completed progress of the prairie from beneficent to indifferent to hostile environment. Ross

rarely develops the image pictorially, but the desolation surrounding his little town of Horizon is there vividly in typical glimpses and in reiteration of the effects those surroundings have on the characters:

> The wind keeps on. It's less than a week since the snowstorm, and the land is already dry again. The dust goes reeling up the street in stinging little scuds. Over the fields this morning on our way to Partridge Hill there were dark, foreboding clouds of it.[63]

Here is the prairie as desert, where nature is inimical to man, and the imaginative response of Ross's characters seems to be a turning inward and stiffening of meagre cultural defences against the natural environment. The defences reflect what Northrop Frye has called the "garrison mentality," aptly embodied in the small town, which in prairie fiction is never a satisfactory alternative to the country. The prairie, even when it threatens man, is capable of a certain sublimity; the small town is always physically ugly and spiritually constricting.

Yet as a strategy for imaginative survival, the "garrison mentality" is here as predictable as it is futile. In an environment with which man has just failed physically as well as spiritually to establish any harmony, hostility is the only alternative to complete emptiness or moral sterility. As Mrs. Bentley puts it, "We shrink from our own insignificance. The stillness and solitude -- we think a presence into it -- even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us -- for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all" (p. 100). The similarity to George Grant's first reaction to the prairie quoted earlier is uncanny. By deciding that the ultimate mystery of the prairie is a hostile force, the imagination manages to

shelter itself from complete unmeaning; but its shelter, like the "house" of Bentley, stifles and distorts all imaginative response to the world.

With As For Me and My House, for the first time in prairie fiction, the struggle for imaginative survival becomes the explicit subject of the fiction. Philip and Mrs. Bentley are both aspiring artists, frustrated by a totally uncongenial environment, acutely sensitive to their isolation, even from each other. The fact that the town aggravates that isolation instead of alleviating it emphasizes the cultural failure which has traditionally left the individual imagination so defenceless against the prairie. In the fiction, man is typically alone, confronting cosmic forces while holding to inadequate sets of traditions which tend more to constrain than to support him.[64]

Developments in painting in the West during the Depression and for the two succeeding decades bore little outward resemblance to what was happening in the fiction. In Winnipeg in the early 1930's, L.L. Fitzgerald and others were starting Canada's first movement into abstract painting, a movement which spread until, during the war years, total nonobjectivity characterized the new painting of the prairies generally.[65] After the war, a wave of abstract expressionism spread from Regina -- particularly the Regina Art School under Kenneth Lockhead -- "to engulf all but a few staunch dissidents on the Prairies."[66] When painters move into nonfigurative expression and abandon what can be called the "literary" or "narrative" element of their art, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw useful -- or even same -- comparisons with the fiction. That is, direct comparisons, for in one sense the artists' eagerness to take up the latest innovations in method suggests that like

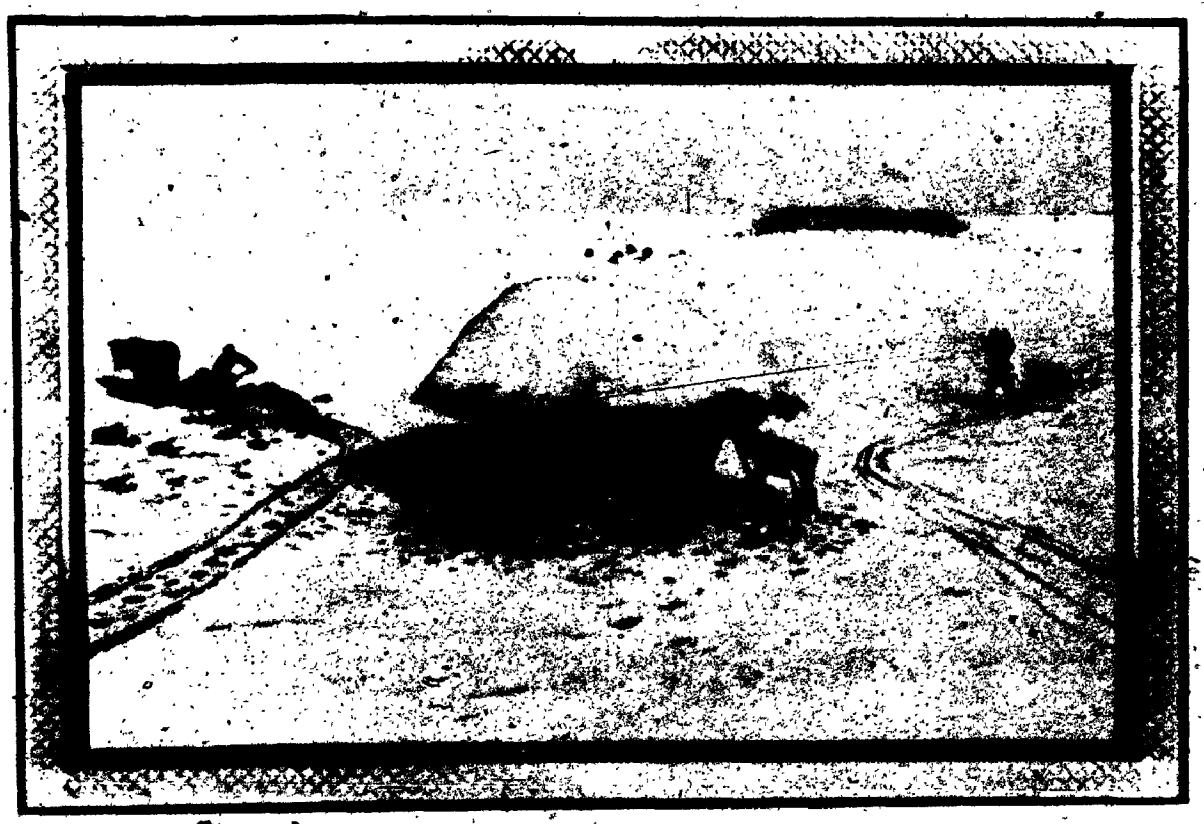


Plate 7: William Kurelek, "We Find All Kinds of Excuses," Mrs. Marshall Cohen, Toronto, printed in William Kurelek, A Retrospective (Edmonton Art Gallery, 1970), n.p.

the novelists they are dissatisfied with the effects achieved with the old methods and are consciously looking for the aesthetic form which will suitably embody their experience of the prairies.

It is not until the return of figuration in the 1960's, that any direct comparisons suggest themselves. When the "narrative" element appears in William Kurelek's paintings, for example, it works ironically. The familiar prairie farmyards (See Plate 7) embody heavy parables and harbour unexpected religious symbols. His technique could be compared to the ironic uses of verisimilitude in the fiction of Robert Kroetsch. More recently, the water colours of Robert Sinclair with their exquisite drawing and their surprising discontinuous use of colour suggest another similarity to the fiction, a tendency to hold the sensory vividness of experience while dissolving the usual continuity of experience, or of art. The effect is to free the essence of the experience from habitual form and habitual perception. In one sequence of Sinclair's water colours, for example, a road appears very vividly, and at first very conventionally. Then the road begins to shift and change in somewhat surreal ways until it suggests rather the idea of a road in your mind and your memory, and what that road has meant in the prairie landscape. I see here a considerable similarity to the post-realist techniques of Kroetsch's fiction -- the same search for form, the same experiments with sensory detail, illusion, discontinuity.

Most of the post-war trends in the West indicate at once a decline in active human contact with the prairie and an increase in detached interest in it as a distinctive environment. The economics of mechanization and marketing have favoured larger farms, turning agriculture

from a way of life to an industry. The surviving smaller holdings are often operated by what Wallace Stegner calls "suitcase farmers" who live on the land only during peak periods of spring and fall activity. Small towns disappear as means of communication accelerate, their functions absorbed by cities which, in most respects, are like cities anywhere. Yet at the same time, there is increasing interest in the prairie as a cultural phenomenon, and there are increasing efforts to preserve its past through parks, historical sites, provincial archives, local histories, historical journals, museums and galleries. Such activity can be recognized as part of a general cultural awakening stirred by urbanization, affluence, and national pride. There are also, for example, more theatres producing Pinter, Beckett, and Albee, but the interest in local cultural and artistic activity is stronger than it has ever been on the prairie. There has not, in fact, been any remarkable increase in the publication of fiction. Book-length fictions set on the prairie have averaged at least three per year for the past hundred years, and do not appear to run much beyond that today. The typical outlook of the more recent fiction does, however, seem to be shifting with the current of general cultural self-consciousness.

The new environment of urbanization and "agribusiness" in a sense contains the older environment of family farm and small town as part of its usable past. The older environment is now something that can be seen and analysed, along with the attitudes it engendered. The novelists' view also tends to be from outside, either because the rural prairie is "over" or because the novelists have moved away. Margaret Laurence, for example, has spent most of her time in Africa, in England

or in Ontario for the past few years; Robert Kroetsch lives in Binghamton, New York, George Ryga in the Okanagan. Possibly for this very reason they have a heightened interest in what Margaret Laurence calls "a coming to some kind of terms with your roots and your ancestors."[67] The present generation of writers are the first who can reasonably claim "roots and ancestors" in the Canadian prairie, and in their looking back, these writers, or at least the best of them, are not nostalgic. They are able to view the prairie environment and their peoples' attempts to adjust to it with new detachment, and they treat the failures of the dominant British-Ontario culture with some asperity. As can be seen in Margaret Laurence's work, there is often sympathy but rarely indulgence for the stubborn pride and short-sightedness of the pioneers.

A parallel trend can be seen in the technique of the novel. The present writers seem more interested in discontinuity in narrative structures, allowing for new collocations of the elements of prairie life. Kroetsch, the most technically adventurous of the group, expresses impatience with "certain traditional kinds of realism,"[68] presumably because he wishes to escape the assumptions implicit in the realistic fiction which shaped an earlier vision of the prairie. He speaks of his own experimentation as an attempt to discover how to write the prairie novel. The novelists, as a special case of the imagination's struggle, are without their own "house of fiction," and must develop ways of articulating what the prairie is to someone whose roots are there. Kroetsch's narrator in The Studhorse Man, Demeter Proudfoot, is one embodiment of their struggle, and his self-consciousness about his art draws attention to the difficulty of treating prairie life in traditional

form. Just as Ross brings the struggle of the imagination to survive in the prairie setting to the level of explicit theme in As For Me and My House, Kroetsch makes the novelist's own art an explicit part of that struggle.[69]

Demeter also draws attention to the fact that it is time rather than space he must reconstruct. For present-day writers the prairie is not longer alien space which must be assimilated, but a formative time they must understand if they are to know themselves. Possibly the prairie is one experience Canada must understand if it is to know itself, and the novelists are exploring new forms or ways of seeing it because they are dissatisfied with the older ways. What D.G. Jones says of the Canadian people in general seems particularly apt for these novelists: "It is apparent that we must move into our own cultural house, for we are no longer at home in the houses of others."[70]

Footnotes

[1]"The Prairie: A State of Mind," in Eli Mandel, ed. Contexts of Canadian Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 257.

[2]Clearing in the West (1935; rpt. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1964), p. 58.

[3]The Canadian West in Fiction (rev. ed.; Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970).

[4]The Long Journey (Toronto: University Press, 1968).

[5]Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).

[6]Vertical Man / Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973).

[7]I am working from descriptions given in W.A. Mackintosh, Prairie Settlement, The Geographical Setting (Toronto: Macmillan, 1934).

[8]Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University Press, 1970), passim.

[9]Russell M. Brown, "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," University of Windsor Review, VIII (Spring 1972), p. 2.

[10]York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55, ed. Lawrence J. Burpee, Trans. of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd series, 1907-08, vol. I, section II.

[11]Voyages (1801; rpt. Toronto: Radisson Society, 1927), p. 69.

[12]Voyages, p. 90.

[13]Voyages, p. 12.

[14]Exploration -- British North America (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863), p. 7.

[15]Palliser, p. 4.

[16]The Great Lone Land (1872; rpt. Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1968), p. 200.

[17]Butler, p. 200.

[18]Butler, p. 206.

[19]Jones, p. 34.

[20]Picturesque Canada (Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882).

[21]Grant, p. 340.

[22]Wolf Willow (New York: Viking, 1955), p. 7.

[23]Butler, p. 351.

[24]Stegner, pp. 6-7.

[25]The North-West Passage by Land (1865; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970), p. 178.

[26]As For Me and My House (1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. 54 -- subsequent page references are to this edition.

[27]Who Has Seen the Wind (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947). p. 3 -- subsequent page references are to this edition.

[28]My Antonia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), p. 7.

[29]"Seeing an Unliterary Landscape," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 3.

[30]"Sources," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 83.

[31]Stories from Indian Wigwams and Northern Campfires (1893; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Colection, 1970), p. 118.

[32]"The House on the Prairies," Canadian Literature, no. 42 (Autumn 1969), 46-55. See also Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow," Canadian Literature, no. 5 (Summer 1960), 7-20.

[33]The Taming of the Canadian West (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), p. 103.

[34]Grant, p. 292.

[35]Joseph Kinsey Howard, Strange Empire (New York: William Morrow, 1952), p. 98.

[36]See Margaret Arnett MacLeod and W.L. Morton, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1963).

[37]The Opening of the Canadian West (London: Heineman, 1967). p. 33.

[38]This is my assumption, based on reading accounts of settlement policy such as Hill's in The Opening of the Canadian West, pp. 162-3. The fact that the opportunity to pre-empt an additional quarter at the time of filing was a later amendment to the Homestead Act suggests to me that official estimates of minimal subsistence farmland were being adjusted to account for conditions in the West.

[39]James Gray, Men Against the Desert (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1967), p. 239.

[40]Hill, p. 162.

[41]"Seeing an Unliterary Landscape," p. 2.

[42]Hill, p. 165.

[43]Grant, p. 321.

[44]Fruits of the Earth (1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1965), p. 138.

[45]"A Prairie Sampler," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 92.

[46]Wanderings of an Artist (1859; rpt. Toronto: Radisson Society, 1925), p. xxxiii.

[47]Kane, Wanderings, p. xxiv.

[48]Painting in Canada (Toronto: University Press, 1966), p. 150.

[49]Kane, Wanderings, p. 49.

[50]The Story of Louis Riel (1885; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970), p. 12.

[51]Clearing in the West, p. 56.

[52]The Prairie Wife (New York: A.L. Burt, 1915), pp. 59-60.

[53]C.A. Dawson and Eva R. Younge, Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process (Toronto: Macmillan, 1940), p. 30.

[54]Jones, p. 73.

[55]Harper, p. 267.

[56]150 Years of Art in Manitoba: Struggle for a Visual Civilization (Winnipeg: Art Gallery, 1970), pp. 16-17.

[57]Dawson and Younge, pp. 120-121.

[58]Gray, Men Against the Desert, p. 13, 15.

[59]Gray, p. 3.

[60]Gray, p. 190.

[61]Gray, p. 9.

[62]Arthur Storey's Prairie Harvest (Toronto: Ryerson, 1959), though undistinguished as fiction, is an informative guide to agricultural ideals and attitudes in Saskatchewan from the first days of settlement through the boom years to the drought. Storey's hero (transparently named "Torey") has an ideal: 1000 acres of wheat. When his single-minded pursuit of this ideal impoverishes his land, the curious reaction of the entire Tory family is a violent hatred of the land, as though it had betrayed them.

[63]Ross, p. 37.

[64]This is true of the "serious" but not of the "popular" tradition, a distinction which will be clarified in Chapters Three and Four.

[65]Harper, p. 351.

[66]Harper, p. 391.

[67]"A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," in Robert Kroetsch and James Bacque, Creation (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p. 55.

[68]Kroetsch, Creation, p. 53.

[69]See particularly The Studhorse Man (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), p. 130.

[70]Jones, p. 3.

CHAPTER II

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Nineteenth Century produced a good deal of fiction set in the Canadian West but very little fiction *of* the West. For the most part, the writers' imaginations could hardly be said to have engaged the new environment, let alone assimilated it to an artistic form. Yet the quality and quantity of the nineteenth-century writings about the prairie are surprising. In addition to the variety of journals, diaries, and reminiscences which are becoming accessible today, over thirty volumes of fiction have come to light and more are discovered every year. They include scattered attempts at a kind of documentary realism, but the most consistent impulses are toward romantic adventure and -- less predictably -- the interplay of manners. The proportions of these types of fiction reflect fairly closely what was being written in central Canada during the mid-Nineteenth Century, but there the conditions were not quite as primitive.[1] The western writers' unlikely choice of social fiction is a possible clue to the difficulty the literary imagination was having in coming to terms with the prairie. The writers, of course, were not native to the West, nor for the most part immigrants, but visitors at best, and if their imaginations were stirred by the new land (or by the idea of it) they sought the reassurance of familiar forms in which to give expression to those stirrings. When Agnes Laut, for example, thought of adventure, she thought of Sir Walter Scott, and the result is evident in her *Lords of the North*.

The early fiction also betrays the attitudes and unconscious cultural patterns which hampered the imagination of the colonists in perceiving and assimilating the new environment and made the struggle for survival, physical and imaginative, more severe than it need have been. It would be unwise, of course, to load a great weight of theory on such a frail body of literature, but often the very failures prove the most illuminating in a cultural sense. They are such imperfectly realized fictions that they provide unusually clear examples of the difficulties the colonists faced and strategies they adopted to overcome them. And the attitudes and cultural "sets" evident in the novels are confirmed again and again in the non-fiction of the period.

Egerton Ryerson Young, in his mission among the tribes of northern Manitoba, provided some richly suggestive illustrations of the nineteenth-century civilized approach to the West, as it appears in both reminiscences and fiction. In his <u>On the Indian Trail</u>, Young recounts his introduction of the Indians to James Evans' Cree syllabics with a simplicity equal to that of the Indians who were first encountering the genuinely magic powers of an alphabet:

> I marked out some simple words such as: ᐸᐸ (pa-pa,) ᒪᒪ (ma-ma,) ᑭᒋᒋ (oo-me-me, - English; pigeon.) I showed them how thus to combine these signs into words. This very much interested them; but the climax came, when with the burnt stick I marked ᒪᐧᐣ (Maneto, - English; God, or the Great Spirit.) Great indeed was the excitement among them. They could hardly believe their own eyes, that before them was Maneto, the Great Spirit. He whom they had heard in the thunder and the storm, whose power they had seen in the lightning flash, about whom, with reverence and awe, they had talked in their wigwams, and at their camp-fires -- "Maneto!" Here, made by a burnt stick on a rock, visible to their eyes, was that name:

> GOD ON THE ROCK! It was indeed a revelation. Something that filled, and thrilled them, as I have never before or since seen Indians thrilled.[2]

Young was unprepared for the Indians' reaction; he evidently regarded the native mind as a sort of tabula rasa, like the rock, on which he could inscribe the name of the divine. It was partly a lack of understanding of his own culture too, since he would have known very little about how the introduction of phonetic transcription had affected his own civilization or how his awareness had been shaped by growing up in a literate society. To him letters were simply a useful abstraction he was offering the less fortunate as a way to God and, incidentally, to white culture, values, and perceptions. He did not realize how much he was asking them to accept, any more than he understood the culture upon which he was trying to impose it. Though he writes elsewhere about the naturally religious disposition of the Indians, he did not seem to grasp the very concrete wholeness of their relationship with the physical world around them, or the pervasiveness and immediacy of their sense of the divine. Without this understanding of land and people, he readily assumed a virgin formlessness upon which he could impress his abstractions. Meanwhile, his pupils made of his letters something very concrete. Like many other educators and colonizers, Young demonstrated, if he did not discover, that the land and the people had a life and a logic of their own.

Young's <u>On the Indian Trail</u> is a useful example because some of the most revealing writing in the early West is not fiction but the journals, diaries, and reports of the explorers, traders, missionaries, and settlers. Some of these writers did attempt fiction, but usually

the conscious intention of art led them to forms which obscured more than they revealed about experience in the West. William Butler's The Great Lone Land is more poetic than his Red Cloud the Solitary Sioux[3] as well as more accurate; Young's own Oowikapun[4] is admittedly an encouragement to young missionaries more than a novel, but its homiletic purpose distorts what even Young must have perceived of the land and the life of the natives.

The narratives of the missionaries are in many ways the most instructive. The missionaries had no conscious desire to exploit the land or the people, and they had every reason for wanting to see them as they were, and not simply in relation to white ideas or designs. As a result, they offer the purest evidence of how Europeanized culture shaped and limited men's response to the new land. Young is an extreme example, a product of a settled Ontario upbringing, never at home in the wilderness, though he suffered its hardships heroically. John McDougall, who came to the prairies at the age of fifteen with his missionary father, George McDougall, was an entirely more adaptable man. An accomplished pioneer as well as a missionary, he lived with his charges and was considered by them an Indian as well as a white man.[5] Yet even McDougall carried with him the inevitable luggage of the early education he had been given in civilized schools. In one startling passage in Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie he attributes the moral degeneration of the Indians to the buffalo herds and tribal communism. He reasons from a Wordsworthian assumption that the "scene of sylvan beauty" along the Saskatchewan should "give them large, broad and fine views of life and all things." Their religion is false, but

also "the great herds of buffalo as abused by man were hurtful to himself, and therefore in the fulness of time the Great Father, in the interests of His children, wiped them from the face of the earth. Tribal communism has always been hurtful to individuality, and without this no race of men can progress" (p. 70).

Aside from what the Wordsworthian approach may have done to his perception of the landscape, these comments reveal some significant things about McDougall. On the one hand it is easy to see why he and the other missionaries were such effective propagandists for the colonization that was to follow them, when a man like McDougall, who was almost as much a hunter and a nomad as the Crees, believed implicitly in the practices and the ideals of the coming colonization. On the other hand, like Young, McDougall reveals the extent to which unconscious patterns of his own culture defined his ability to see the life of the West. Agriculture, individualism, and progress were surely no more than peripheral to his professed religious beliefs, yet they became the main burden of his mission, and must be the only considerations that could lead a humane man to call the destruction of the Indians' food supply a divine, paternal act.

If the missionaries served as propagandists they were themselves the victims of a subtle and pervasive propaganda of the sort Marshall McLuhan and Wilfred Watson discuss in From Cliche to Archetype, a propaganda that is environmental and invisible. They had quite naturally been exposed to it all their civilized lives: "The total life of any culture tends to be 'propaganda' . . . . It blankets perception and suppresses awareness, making the counter-environments

created by the artist indispensable to survival and freedom."[6] The first part of this statement is an interesting reflection on missionaries and settlers. Paradoxically, the white colonizers entering this strange and overpowering environment clung to the forms of their previous environment as the only means of survival, physical or cultural, in the face of apparent chaos. We can see the tendency of these forms to "blanket perception and suppress awareness" indispensable to survival. Survival of the imagination was made especially precarious by this "blanketing." The latter part of the McLuhan-Watson statement is an interesting way of seeing the failure of the nineteenth-century fiction of the West. The writers, remaining within familiar forms and attitudes, reinforced inappropriate responses to the prairie when genuinely artistic "counter environments" could have freed the imagination to see the new country as it was.

The prose romance should have provided a form adaptable to the opening of the Canadian West, but that adaptation was never made during the Nineteenth Century. It would be easy to attribute this failure to a simple lack of literary talent, but there are other impediments to be found in the attitudes of the writers and in the way they chose their form. To be successful the fiction would have had to be romance of distinctly western aspirations. These aspirations were not clearly conceived and too often the romancers used the western setting for the working out of old world or eastern dreams. That tendency was evidently reinforced by their choosing the form too immediately from its use in other contexts, from Scott or Cooper or popular fiction of the American West.

The most blatant examples of this ignorant or casual misuse of the western setting are in J.E. Collins' The Story of Louis Riel (1885) and Annette the Metis Spy (1887).[7] Collins and his publisher obviously wanted to exploit the popular excitement over the rebellion of 1885; the first of their books, as Collins admits, "occupied me only seveenteen [sic] days."[8] Collins' model could have been sensational popular romance such as the "Dime Novels." His form demanded that there be a hero, a villain and a heroine; southern Ontario sentiment demanded that the hero be Thomas Scott and the villain Riel. Collins created a girl friend for Scott to provide the love triangle and the motivation for Riel's a) executing Scott and b) raising a rebellion. Both Collins' books portray the most ludicrous sort of hair's-breadth escape adventure, with even an odd gothic touch. Riel, for example, knows a witch in a dismal swamp who holds young women hostage for him. The Story of Louis Riel is the more interesting of the two because it was written while the rebellion was still going on, and it dwindles away at the end into casualty lists for the battles of Fish Creek and Batoche. The effect on the reader is like being wakened from a dream. A similar but more powerful effect is produced by the newspaper accounts of Riel's trial bound in at the end of the book. In striking contrast to Collins' own writing, the bare journalistic accounts are so much more moving than Collins' sensationalism that they expose the flimsy contrivance to which they are appended.

The violence Collins does to events and personalities of western history in the process is too copious and too apparent to need

detailed examination, but a comparison with John Kinsey Howard's Strange Empire[9] (a pro-Metis history) reveals a great deal about the attitudes involved. Collins' books would still have been harmless amusements except for their evident intention to exploit and foment the bitter anti-French, anti-Catholic sentiments widely held in southern Ontario at the time. These intentions are supported by Collins' faintly plausible claims to historical accuracy. In a note to Annette, where he is doing a certain amount of confessing, Collins says, "I present some fiction in my story, and a large array of fact. I do not feel bound, however, to state which is the fact, which the fiction" (p. 142). The result is a wilful mispresentation of the West, catering to an outside audience's prejudices about what was going on there.

The land fares no better than the people at Collins' hands. In the same note he says:

> The preceding story lays no claim to value or accuracy in its descriptions of the North-West Territories. I have never seen that portion of our country. . . .
>
> I have, therefore, arranged the geography of the Territories to suit my own conveniences. I speak of places that no one will be able to find upon maps of the present or of the future. Wherever I want a valley or a swamp, I put the same; and I have taken the same liberty with respect to hills or waterfalls. The birds, and in some instances the plants and flowers of the prairies, I have also made to order. (p. 142)

It was not Collins' ignorance so much as his contempt for his subject which made his writings a disservice to the West and to the people who were going out to settle in it. By helping to sustain the conception

of the West as a land of harmless adventure or as a property the righteous must recover from the unrighteous, he helped to retard the development of any appropriate sense of the West.

Among the early writers of romance, Agnes Laut is probably the extreme opposite to Collins. Her intention was to make the early history more colourful and more attractive for the sake of students,[10] and her Lords of the North (1900) shows evidence of careful research into the history of the Red River Settlement and the conflict between the fur companies which threatened its survival.[11] Promising material for romantic adventure certainly existed in accounts of the tactics of the two companies, who ambushed each other's northern fur brigades, burned each other's forts, occasionally murdered each other's employees, and frequently arrested each other's leaders, all with the colour of conflicting legal rights emanating from London and Montreal. When Laut sets out to enliven this material with the appeal of fiction, however, the form she chooses is a romance of tangled intrigue, reminiscent of Walter Scott. Her hero is in quest of a friend's wife and child, stolen away by a mixed band of dishonest Indians, half-breeds, and trappers. Throughout his search he courts a trader's daughter and carries on a deadly but chivalric enmity with a French-Canadian rival. The incongruity of the form is often emphasized by Laut's quite unromantic comments upon the native people. After a Metis foray against the settlers, for example, she says, "Victors from war may be inspiring, but a half-breed rabble, red-handed from deeds of violence, is not a sight to edify any man" (p. 154). After a description of the disastrous confrontation which became known as "The Seven-Oaks Massacre" she comments, "Let us not, with the deprecatory hypocrisy,

characteristic of our age, befool ourselves into any belief that barbaric practices were more humane than customs which are the flower of civilized centuries" (p. 351). Since her anti-romantic tone is applied only to the natives and never to, say, the implausibly courtly young lovers Rufus and Miriam, the effect is an essentially old-world, aristocratic romance. Unlike the work of Collins, Lords of the North represents an honest encounter with the history of the West, yet it too is a retreat into an inappropriate form. Both the Selkirk Settlement and the nature of Laut's art come into clearer perspective when Lords with its "norwester" hero is read together with Frederick Niven's Mine Inheritance[12] with its Hudson Bay Company hero and Mrs. A. McLeod's Cuthbert Grant,[13] which is a very sympathetic biography of the Metis' leader of the time (significantly, a corresponding Metis fiction is missing). The stereoscopic effect brings into relief the feelings of the contending groups, including the settlers themselves, who were thrown into circumstances which were distinctive if not unique in Canadian history.

Between the negligence of Collins and the care of Agnes Laut can be found a full range of adventure romances, most designed for a British audience and many for juvenile readers. R.M. Ballantyne's Red Man's Revenge (1886)[14] belongs with the raft of adventure stories he set in all of the romantic areas of the world, though it enjoys the benefits of Ballantyne's service with the Hudson Bay Company at Norway House and York Factory from 1841 to 1845.[15] His main characters are nonetheless solidly British, his natives either heathen devils or noble savages, but the land and some local customs are given with

reasonable accuracy. W.F. Butler's Red Cloud, The Solitary Sioux (1882) is not entirely escapist romance either. It has some of the qualities of an anatomy in Butler's minute detailing of the ways of survival on the prairie -- even a kind of Robinson Crusoe appeal -- but the plot of Red Cloud's revenge for the betrayal of his father by an unscrupulous trader, the hunts and harrowing escapes, are standard, though here more reminiscent of Cooper than of Scott. The most obviously Cooperesque touches are to be found in Achilles Daunt's In the Land of the Moose the Bear and the Beaver (1885).[16] His Old Jake Hawker is Cooper's Leatherstocking with a dash of Stevenson's Long John Silver. Much of the naturalist's detail in Daunt is probably authentic, but the effect of putting it in the mouth of an ill-created character who never quite belongs is a fatal bookishness about all the woodlore.

John Mackie, writing for a more adult British audience, produced the largest group of adventure fictions of the nineteenth-century prairie West, including The Devil's Playground (1894), Sinners Twain (1895), The Prodigal's Brother (1899), The Heart of the Prairie (1899), and later The Rising of the Red Man (1904).[17] Mackie evidently cared more about his reading public than about his setting. Although he served in the NWMP from 1888 to 1893[18] he lards his stories with fanciful episodes such as Indian uprisings against the settlers and battles in which the NWMP quite uncharacteristically slaughter several hundred Sioux. He may have taken these sensational episodes from the American West partly because that would be the West his readers were most familiar with.

Mackie also invents lost lakes with mysterious islands almost as freely as Collins would, but in most of his descriptions the flora, fauna and general terrain are faithfully and often imaginatively described. Like many of the later writers, he had read Butler's The Great Lone Land. Not only does he use the expression in his preface to The Heart of the Prairie, but he displays something of Butler's ambivalent emotion about the prairie sea. Here, for example, is a sleigh-ride across the Regina Plains area in The Prodigal's Brother:

> It filled one with an overpowering sense of the immensity and loneliness of that vast prairie-land; and had it not been for the subdued hiss of the runners over the crisp snow, resembling the steady seething of water past a ship's side, and the jangling of bells, one would have felt that the silence of this land was something appalling -- a veritable presence that weighed on the soul like a nightmare, till the victim was fain to cry out to free himself from the spell. (pp. 117-118)

This could be straight Butler, but even so, it is one of the most vivid reactions to the land in the early fiction. In acknowledging the power of the landscape and its demands upon the imagination, Mackie anticipates such later romancers as Connor and Stringer, and to some extent the later realists who are concerned with the "presence that weighed on the soul like a nightmare."

Mackie's books are not devoted entirely to adventure, and this again could have been a response to literary fashion of the time. He provides some description of the strange land, some action, but another of his main concerns is with human interchange on a social level. Here, for example, a crudely mercenary suitor is attempting to ingratiate himself with a Mackie heroine by acts of largess:

> "I'd like to please, and I like you to think well of me . . . Hang trouble and expense, I say."
>
> She was conscious of a sense of disappointment, but still she knew the danger she was exposed to by her critical and hypersensitive nature, and tried to lose sight of much that his speech implied. [19]

Mackie's frequent efforts to articulate social and psychological nuances of this sort place him with the early social novelists of the West as well as with the adventure romance writers.

In most of the early fiction the interchange of manners carries less weight of the book's significance than the adventurous action, but there is one remarkable exception, a little book entitled One Mistake, published under the pseudonym "Zero" by the Canada Bank Note Company of Montreal in 1888. The heroine-narrator, Miss Nelly Devigne, who describes herself as "a thorough-going flirt," is over from London for a year's amusement in Winnipeg. The time must be nearly coincident with the Northwest Rebellion and with Manitoba's turmoil over schools and provincial boundaries, but the action is confined entirely to the drawing rooms and social excursions of the Winnipeg British community. Aside from its continual love intrigues, the book constitutes an anatomy of Winnipeg social life in the 1880's. Miss Devigne makes the rounds of skating, snowshoeing and tobagganing parties as well as teas, dances, and a "musicale" at the lieutenant-Governor's (where the people must be asked not to talk during the numbers).

Miss Devigne's ironic commentary on the social elite of Winnipeg does not usually produce delicate nuances of sentiment or a subtle awareness of man as a social animal. Her tone, instead, becomes

supercilious, mocking, and her revelations obvious and heavy-handed. This scene from a dance is about as near as she comes to effective satire:

> Deserted by my cavalier, I ventured to address a few remarks to one of Mrs. Grundy's monitors, who sat upon my right, but, inadvertently, and most indiscretely, using, in the course of conversation, the oldest fashioned term descriptive of the two appendanges by which rude Nature has sustained what brave men dare to call our "trunks" (I wonder whom I'm shocking now!) this worthy chaperone (first looking everywhere, to ensure no male attendance, and evidently fearful lest some breeze should bear the sentence to an outraged native ear, then, glancing upon me with the amused peculiar smile, usually worn when gazing on a somewhat shocking picture, in a nice retired place) said: -
>
> "We don't use 'leg' in Canada." (p. 71)

Quite incidentally "Zero" anticipates the withering force of propriety in later prairie fiction.

What "Zero's" efforts usually demonstrate, not unexpectedly, is that the texture of Winnipeg manners in the 1880's is not sufficiently developed to sustain a revealing or even steadily entertaining fiction. It is not simply that the social niceties are not refined enough to be satirized effectively, but that examining the characters in the glass of London manners fails to reveal them. We are left with the impression of a London belle who, like Margaret Atwood's Susanna Moodie, has come away from the wilderness without quite having learned what it might have taught her.[20]

A comparison with Mrs. Moodie is useful in another way. Nellie Devigne belongs in a long line of feminine "confessional" narrators in Canadian fiction, beginning with Frances Brooke's Emily Montague.

They all describe the collision of a cultivated sensibility with the rudeness of Canadian pioneer society, and usually their initial attitudes of revulsion or condescending amusement at their new surroundings undergo a gradual shift toward acceptance or respect if not identification with those surroundings. Miss Devigne's first comment upon the West, for example, is "We spent three days in travelling through scenes which differed but in their variety of wildness, one question only arising to the mind -- How mortals could be found to squander years of their existence (I am not capable of that gross flattery which would call it life) amidst those barren rocks and half-charred stumps, or still more naked looking prairie." Later she can remark that "The crispness of the air, the clearness of the night, and the brilliancy of the stars and moon, all struck me as sublime." And it is finally in the rude innocence of the West that this very callous flirt falls in love -- the "one mistake" she warns other young ladies to avoid. In prairie fiction the nearest relative of One Mistake is Stringer's prairie trilogy, and a line of descent from Stringer's prairie wife to Mrs. Bentley in Ross's As For Me and My House is not difficult to trace.

Another of the early novels relying heavily on an interplay of manners deserves some attention. James Morton's Polson's Probation (1897)[21] is the story of a young man who comes to Manitoba as a "Farm Pupil" because his inheritance in England is conditional on his avoiding disgrace for five years. Polson's distant cousin and rival for the legacy follows to engineer his disgrace, passing as one Silas Pancrack. He tries unsuccessfully to frame Polson for the murder of an Indian, and

must himself retreat to England in disgrace and in the snares of his loathly lady accomplice, while Polson returns with honour, wealth, and the fair maid, Miss Crags. The setting is undeniably rural Manitoba, but Morton imposes upon it a form of English country-house life in which the young men hunt, snowshoe, attend teas, discuss manners and philosophy, and vie politely for the favours of Miss Crags, but never seem to do any farm work. We know from first-hand accounts that the Farm Pupil was more often a source of £100 and a free hired man for some unscrupulous farmer.[22] Polson's book belongs to the tradition of the Victorian novel, in that manners and their ironic relation to morals (the villain Pangrack is exasperatingly suave) are very much the subject of the action.

Like One Mistake, Morton's book does not offer a real encounter with prairie life, but it is significant in several incidental ways. In contrast to his stock characters and his copious and improbable plot, Morton's descriptions of the environment are detailed, particular, and realistic. His narrative of a death in a blizzard, for example, is one of the best before Frederick Philip Grove. Polson's Probation also offers a paradigm of the distinctly colonial fiction of the West in which England remains the great good place and the reward of virtue is to return there in good circumstances. The Northwest is always a kind of "probation," a means of isolating a few British people for scrutiny. This attitude is seen in its most innocent frankness in the charming little stories co-authored by Anne Mercier and Violet Watt, A Home in the Northwest (1894) and The Red House by the Rockies (1896).[23] When one of their characters says, "Could we not help to build a

church here, father? It would be such a blessing to have something to work for, and to leave behind us when we go back to England,"[24] there need never have been any earlier mention of going back. That outcome is implicit in the whole moral perspective of the colonial fiction. The source of the characters' honour, courage and stamina is their Britishness, and an old world concern for birth and breeding accompanies that pride of nationality. When two of Mercier and Watt's characters appear out of a blizzard, it is said, "That they were English gentlemen was apparent from their first sentence. . . ."[25]

Choosing a type of fiction better suited to an English drawing room than to a sod hut may not have been simply -- or even primarily -- a literary error on the part of the colonial writers. When you consider a phenomenon like Cannington Manor you can wonder to what extent the writers were faithfully representing a comically inappropriate approach to the prairies. In 1882 Captain E.M. Pierce was given a grant of land by his friend John A. Macdonald to set up an English colony south of Moosomin in what is now southern Saskatchewan.[26] The colony was to sustain itself by growing and processing farm products, but the actual work was to be done by Canadian pioneers. The way of life of the well-to-do principals of the scheme was to be transplanted intact from Britain, "That of an English country gentleman comprising leisure for culture and sport" (p. 3). The only other responsibility they acknowledged was for unpaid service to the community as magistrates and administrators. Their houses suggested the style in which they intended to live. One is described as having "four large reception rooms on the ground floor, as well as kitchen and a large storeroom, with eleven rooms above" (p. 11).

Two men were kept busy all winter cutting wood to heat this home. Another of the houses, built of stone, featured an added "bachelor wing." "This, with a separate entrance, consisted of a hall with stairs up to the sleeping quarters for bachelors known as the 'ram's pasture' above the long room with full sized billiard table, so often described -- the Beckton brothers in leather chairs by the fireplace, served by a valet, one Harrison, with drinks, and a dozen or more of the happy-go-lucky type of young Englishman as well as any visiting sportsmen milling around" (p. 14). The young men are said to have "made a real stab at farming," but the farm instructor is quoted as saying, "I was glad when the young gentlemen took up tennis so I could get on with the work" (p. 16).

Tennis, horseracing, and riding to the hounds were favorite sports, but the catalogue of their amusements included: hunting, football, cricket, music, literature, theatricals, painting, philosophical discussions, gourmet cooking, tobogganing, skating, swimming, and sketching parties. They sound, in fact, as though they must have quite wearied themselves with leisure activities. The suspicion that these activities were as much an effort to maintain their identity in the face of the prairie as they were a pleasure is reinforced by the fact that even the typical bachelor's shack contained "a pile of Christmas numbers, silver-framed portraits, school sport trophies and a view of their home in England graciously encircled by trees" (p. 17). The colony failed, not unexpectedly, partly because an anticipated C.P.R. branch line by-passed it, partly because the men went away to the First World War and never bothered to return. Writers

like Mackie, "Zero", and Morton may be seen as chronicling this approach to the prairie — their failures equivalent to the more eloquent failure of the Cannington Manor way of life. In fact as well as in fiction, some immigrants typically responded to the space and silence by sheltering in older, impractical "houses."

There were some among the earliest writers who, unlike the writers of adventure romance or social fiction, had a strong impulse to document in fiction the new experience of the West. Writers already mentioned, such as Mackie, Butler, and Morton, appear to have seen some aspects of the prairie clearly, but they were always ready to sacrifice the new setting to the old form of their fictions. Some others, such as Alexander Begg, John MacLean, and Helen Hayes were evidently not as ready to do this; their stories are inclined to be short and often somewhat formless. An occasional well-wrought short story appears, but most of the works could better be described as "tales." They also tend toward that end of the scale at which fiction blends gradually into reportage.

Paradoxically, one such writer, Bertram Tennyson, was a frequent visitor to Cannington Manor.[27] At times his style exhibits a lyric excess he might have developed from trying to imitate his uncle Alfred, but his The Land of Napioa published in Moosomin in 1896[28] includes stories and reflective essays seriously concerned with finding the West as a setting for imaginative writing. His best story is "Blizzard," about a man who dies snow blind and lost in the prairie and in memories of England, but more unusual is his grasp of the problem faced by writers in what he calls "this young hobbledehoy giant of Canada" (p. 44).

He sees particularly the problem of the immigrant writer, remarking that "every man sees in nature that which he brings eyes to see" (p. iv). As though to illustrate his point; Tennyson later presents a prose poem dramatizing a C.P.R. locomotive crossing the West as a new Thor. His sense of an unrecognized heroic grandeur in man's technology confronting obdurate nature anticipates what E.J. Pratt was to do more than a quarter of a century later, but Tennyson's Thor remains alien and artificial.

The only novel-length fiction to offer a realistic picture of prairie life in this period is Alexander Begg's Dot It Down (1871).[29] If Begg's impulse to do justice to the Red River Settlement and its people was strong, his story-telling impulse was correspondingly weak. His plot remains a lifeless skeleton, often neglected for digressions about life in the settlement. His Mr. and Mrs. Meridith become slightly involved in the historic controversy surrounding the handover of H.B.C. rights and responsibilities to the Canadian government, but in the end they settle happily. Their daughter Grace dies of a tragic love for George Wade, a man with a past he cannot reveal. Their two sons, Tom and Jack, remain healthy, strapping, and absolutely undifferentiated. Begg, of course, was primarily an historian, and throughout his novel he shows an historian's concern for representing fairly the four interest groups at work in the colony just before the Manitoba Resistance of 1869-70. He describes the Canadian party, the American party, the local residents (including the Metis), and the H.B.C., whose interests seem fairly well identified with those of the settlers. There is a strong sense of the immediacy of history, especially because the

book was written when the troubled question of annexation was unresolved. In the last scene, George Wade is returning to the settlement past armed Metis guards posted to prevent the entry of would-be governor McDougall.

"Dot it Down" is actually a minor figure, a Canadian newspaper correspondent who prints slanderous nonsense about the people of Red River. He is a fairly obvious but not very telling lampoon of Charles Mair. The satire was clearly intended to counteract irresponsible reportage, not to antagonize Canadians. Begg's attitude toward Canadian immigration, as well as his overall documentary or journalistic purpose, is evident in the fact that the book ends with a twelve-page "Emigrant's Guide to Manitoba," filled with practical information, including a description of the use of fence wire for farmers who have known only pole fences.

The only significant turn of Begg's plot in Dot it Down is the final marriage of his young English gentleman, George Wade, to a Scots half-breed girl. The move is unexpected but not really atypical. One of the most notable features of all the more realistic nineteenth-century fiction is that the native people are depicted more sympathetically and more sensitively than they would be again for several decades. There seems to be a surprisingly close correlation between a writer's imaginative understanding of the land and his sympathy for the native people.

The largest group of stories devoted to Indians and mixed-bloods is in Warden of the Plains (1896)[30] where John MacLean not only creates a series of tales about Indians but recounts the Indians'

own tales, legends, and myths, as he does in "The Spirit Guide." MacLean was a Methodist missionary in Alberta from 1880 to 1889, and since he wrote non-fiction about the ways of the Indians, his material is probably authentic, and his respect for his subject is evident.[31] As he says, "These people are often called savages by members of the white race, yet they have been taught the greatest respect for all forms of religion, recognizing these forms as methods by which men approach the supreme Power."[32] And MacLean's stories are compelling as well as credible; for all their formlessness, they are rendered in a style of low-key realism reminiscent of Bret Harte. Here, for example, is MacLean's description of a hotel-keeper who harbours a sick wayfarer in "The Hidden Treasure": "He was rough and ready in language and manners, drank freely and gambled and grumbled continually, yet in all the country there was not a more tender-hearted man. He had an Indian wife and several half-breed children, whom he loved intensely and swore at incessantly" (p. 265). It is a pity that MacLean's mastery of dialogue lags so far behind his narrative and descriptive skill. His white characters speak an essentially American wild-west dialect broken into occasionally by a heavy Scots burr. For all that, his stories are as near to "local colorist" realism as anything in his time and place.

The relationship between Indian and White is seen as problematic in much of the early realistic fiction. MacLean's "The White Man's Bride," for example, is one instance of a recurring story about Indian wives abandoned by traders unwilling to stay with them or to take them back to England. Roger Pocock and Helen Hayes both seek out the less

obvious aspects of the Indians' plight. Though Pocock was an English adventurer rather than an immigrant, he had a wide variety of experience in the West, including service in the NWMP from 1884 to 1886,[33] and he seems to have responded especially to the tragic or pathetic sentiments aroused by the Indian in a white-dominated world. In his Tales of Western Life (1888)[34] "The Lean Man" is a half sardonic half sympathetic story of an Indian who, though not scrupulously honest, is in this case arrested for someone else's crime. After languishing for a time in a NWMP guard room, Lean Man hangs himself with his sash and regains something of his original nobility in this last act of defiance. Another story, "Eric," is suggestive of D.C. Scott's concern for the confusing heritage of the mixed-blood. Pocock's half-breed is unusually gifted, but because he is ruined by the mistakes of callous authorities, he drowns himself. Pocock's elegy for Eric runs: "There is always one great question about such a man: whether he will find scope for his endowments and master some great art, or drift idly, bearing the rich freight of genius without either helm or sail until a storm arise" (p. 119). It is clear that the half-breed's lack of opportunity to find scope for his genius is the cause of this tragic waste.

Pocock is at his best when presenting the circumstances and feelings of the Mounties he served with. His stories exhibit compassion for the native people more than an understanding of their psychology. Helen Hayes, on the other hand, includes one story in her Prairie Pot-Pourri (1895)[35] designed to lead the reader into a peculiarly Indian point of view on what the white man is doing to the native.

"An Episode at Clarke's Crossing" is about a Sioux named Peter Larue, or "Daddy Pete" to his granddaughter Tannis. The girl is wooed by a young missionary named Penrhyn, who believes the Indians should have Indian teachers and sends Tannis away to school. There she becomes very thoroughly conditioned to eastern, civilized, white ways. The tragic effects of Penrhyn's liberal and somewhat paternalistic gesture are seen in the destruction of the bond between the girl and her grandfather. Tannis is embarrassed, for example, by the childish and gaudy presents Daddy Pete has proudly collected for her return. When the young minister is recalled by his bishop for becoming involved with an Indian girl, Tannis pines away in the now alien surroundings and eventually wanders off to die. The old man, reduced to senility by her loss, goes in search of her, and in an eerie final scene, walks into the gleaming waters of a moonlit lake imagining he follows her trail. While the ending may be sentimental, a distinctive Indian character is simply and convincingly portrayed; and the complication of motives and their effects does justice to the larger problem of a white culture imposing itself upon the indigenous one.

Miss Hayes' other stories are not as well written, but they all share an evident desire to present the West through western eyes. There is a preference for western ways and an assumption of western values, whether white or native. In "The La-de-dah from London," for example, we are shown the comic ineptitude of an English gentleman travelling to the Northwest with a Canadian farmer. His dialect is unpronounceable, his mistakes and cultivated excesses unforgivable, but in Miss Hayes' world he is able to redeem himself by losing his

fortune and marrying a sensible Canadian farm girl. Miss Hayes effects a complete reversal of the moral orientation of the "colonial" fiction.

The work of Begg, Hayes, and MacLean could have been the beginning of a western regional literature, but it did not happen that way, for at least two reasons. First, the writers of the next thirty years did not follow their lead or share their outlook. In particular, their will to document and their sympathy for the land and the native people were lost. Nor did later writers choose to accept a certain formlessness in preference to imposing distorting forms on western life. In most respects, the fiction of the next three decades has more in common with John Mackie's work. Second, these "realists" probably did not speak for the people who were settling the West any more than the Mackies or the Collinses. Possibly not as much. Writers like MacLean and Hayes seem to have come nearer to speaking for the new land, but the Mackies and Collinses probably spoke for a people who were themselves out of touch with the land. Mackie's and Collins' perspective on the settling of the West would not be popular today, but it may well have reflected the state of mind and imagination of the bulk of the settlers.

To judge by surviving accounts, the average pioneer was not very responsive to the land, and had little sympathy for the Indian he was displacing. His strategies for surviving imaginatively were analogous to those of the writers considered here as "non-realists." The settler seems to have thought a little of the romance of the frontier in a general way, while in particulars he hugged the belief that nothing

fundamental was changed in his surroundings. Lizzie McFadden is in many respects typical of the settlers who have left journals, and two pages from her diary of a migration to Prince Albert in 1879 convey more of the pioneer's state of mind than any explanation.[36] (See xerox copy opposite.)

Miss McFadden offers a first response to the prairie all the more eloquent for being almost illiterate. She has some vague sense that the prairie is beautiful, but her "no wood nor water to be got" is strangely similar to what Anthony Henday reported on first seeing the prairie a hundred years earlier. The journey -- and the diary -- are mainly a struggle to survive and get to the free land over a trying succession of very prosaic obstacles. The trail is well populated, and there is little sense of discovery. The Indians, it later becomes clear, are starving, and that may well have been what they were trying to tell the McFaddens. A few days later Lizzie reports that the Indians' dogs have tried to steal their meat and her father has shot at them but missed. "In the Morning we started away early in the morning as we passed the Indian tents they all came out and laughed at us. . . ." The lack of an intellectual or imaginative framework which will contain even these few incidents is strongly evident. Lizzie McFadden's diary is typical of pioneer accounts in that things seem to happen to her in a kind of vacuum in the new land. Writers like Begg, MacLean, and Hayes could not be said to have spoken for such pioneers, though they might have spoken <u>to</u> them with good effect had the circumstances of publishing and distribution been more favorable at the time. Hayes' <u>Prairie Pot-Pourri</u>, for example, was published

(Friday 18th AD)
Rained in the morning did not start till pretty late started and went through MacArmon field and over a bridge he built and paid him 90 cents for to go over had to go over pretty ruf roads and thro a bush about a mile long camped for noon at a crick it rained all the morning got some berries this morning seen beautiful fields and prarie great hills and dails talked with some Indians could not under-

(Saturday th 19)
Started of early before the sun was up. with out our breakfast came four miles to pine crick had breakfast and fed the oxen started again over hills and hollows had beautiful roads all the way had dinner on a at eleven in the mid of a prarie no wood nor water to be got seen some farms camped at night at boggie crick made eighteen miles to day.

(Sunday th 20)

by the Stoval Printing Company in Winnipeg, which would probably not have had distribution facilities to reach much of the population.

The roots of our prairie culture are probably in the diaries of all the Lizzie McFaddens, but in another sense they are in these imperfect fictions, where we can find a surprising number of the themes and motifs which become important in later fiction. "Zero" and the tradition of genteel complaint about cultural deprivation have already been mentioned. A good deal of later fiction, like that of Harold Bindloss, carries on the practice of writing western stories for an overseas audience, with very British assumptions about society and the land. Butler, in his Red Cloud, initiates a motif of westward journeying which recurs from R.J.C. Stead through Robert Kroetsch. Butler's hero completes his quest at the Rockies with satisfying revenge and material rewards; later writers were to work more sophisticated and often ironic variations upon the theme of westward questing. Even the theme of temperance which was to become so prominent in the work of Connor and McClung is initiated here, especially in Morton's Polson's Probation. Silas Pancrack is only one of the villains. The other less explicit one is liquor, which degrades both the poor settlers and the Indians in the stoty.

These elements appear almost at random, but there is a group of images, best exemplified in the work of John Mackie, which lead directly into the fiction of the first two decades of the Twentieth Century. Mackie develops the fictional Mountie, which Connor, Gilbert Parker, and others were to take up. The press, and particularly the American press, were busily developing the same figure, but it must still be

regarded as a literary image -- the real mounted policeman was being neglected by writers and Ottawa politicians alike.[37] Mackie's response to the overpowering immensity and loneliness of the west has already been quoted. His approach to the land also prefigures what writers like Connor, McClung, Stead, and Stringer were to do. What seems more directly to anticipate the later writers is Mackie's occasional reflection upon the West as a clarified, simplified model of life. Here, for example, the heroine of his The Prodigal's Brother compares the West with her Ontario home: "She had more time to think, she saw a less conventional life; its phases were obvious; her mental vision was cleared so that she could understand aright many social questions that had before perplexed her; and her views of things in general gained in breadth" (p. 76). Mackie offers the beginnings of a view of the West as wide open mental spaces, which was the first view to become popular in fiction. Nothing like a continuous tradition of descent or influence could be argued from these few similarities; it seems more likely that the prairie evokes certain themes and images.

Finally the nineteenth-century fictions are of more interest as examples than as influences. They present the rawest encounter between the white settler and the prairie, and that experience, in one form or another, remains a basic element of the later fiction. They are also the first of a long series of attempts to solve the problem apparent in Lizzie McFadden's diary: the lack of an imaginative framework to point the order and keep out the chaos. Perhaps because of the violence of that first collision of European sensibilities with the raw prairie, the problem of imaginative order has been an unusually intractable one.

Footnotes

[1]Norah Storey, The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 253.

[2]On the Indian Trail (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.[1888]), p. 89.

[3]Red Cloud, the Solitary Sioux (London: Burns and Oates, n.d.).

[4]Oowikapun or How the Gospel Reached the Nelson River Indians (Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1896).

[5]John McDougall, Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), p. 181.

[6]From Cliché to Archetype (New York: Viking, 1970), p. 82.

[7]The Story of Louis Riel, the Rebel Chief (1885; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970) and Annette the Metis Spy (Toronto: Rose, 1886).

[8]Annette, p. 143.

[9]Strange Empire (New York: William Morrow, 1952).

[10]Storey.

[11]Lords of the North (Toronto: Ryerson, 1900).

[12]Mine Inheritance (Toronto: Collins, 1940).

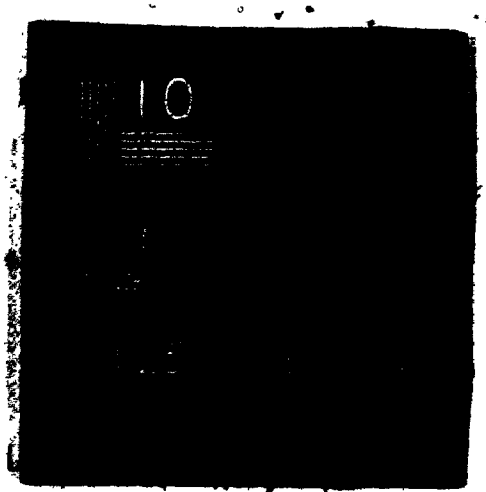
[13]Margaret Arnett McLeod and W.L. Morton, Cuthbert Grant of Grantown (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

[14]Red Man's Revenge (Toronto: Musson, 1886).

[15]Joan Selby, "Ballantyne and the Fur Traders," Canadian Literature, no. 18 (Autumn 1963), 40-46.

2 3

OF/DE



[16]In the Land of the Moose, the Bear and the Beaver (London: T. Nelson, 1885).

[17]The Devil's Playground (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1894), Sinners Twain, A Romance of the Great Lone Land (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), The Prodigal's Brother (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1899), The Heart of the Prairie (London: Nisbet, n.d. [1899]), The Rising of the Red Man, a Romance of the Louis Riel Rebellion (London, Jarrold, n.d. [1904]).

[18]Storey.

[19]The Prodigal's Brother, p. 127.

[20]"Departure from the Bush," The Journals of Susanna Moodie (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 26.

[21]Polson's Probation (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1899).

[22]"My Four Years of Experience in the North-West of America: Roughing it in the Far West," unpublished, Public Archives of Canada.

[23]A Home in the Northwest (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, n.d. [1894]), and Red House by the Rockies (Toronto: Musson, 1896).

[24]A Home, p. 67.

[25]A Home, p. 64.

[26]A.E.M. Hewlett, A Saskatchewan Historic Site, Cannington Manor Historic Park (Saskatchewan Diamond Jubilee and Canada Centennial Corporation, 1967), p. 2. Subsequent information and quotations about Cannington Manor are from this source.

[27]Cannington Manor, p. 20.

[28]The Land of Napioa (Moosomin, NWT: Spectator Printing and Publishing Company, 1896).

[29]Dot it Down (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1871).

[30]Warden of the Plains (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1896).

[31]Storey.

[32]Warden, p. 240.

[33]Storey.

[34]Tales of Western Life (Ottawa: C.W. Mitchell, 1888).

[35]Prairie Pot-Pourri (Winnipeg: The Stoval Company, Printers, 1895).

[36]Diary of Lizzie McFadden, 1879, unpublished, Public Archives of Canada.

[37]See, for example, Ronald Atkin, Maintain the Right (London: Macmillan, 1973).

CHAPTER III

THE GARDEN MYTH

Prairie fiction in the early Twentieth Century is distinguished from what had gone before by the emergence of a shared imaginative vision of the new land. The nineteenth-century writers applied a number of stereotypes to the Canadian prairie with limited success, but taken as a whole their work conveys no sense of a shared vision of the setting. From the turn of the century to the mid-1920's the most popular writers, including Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, R.J.C. Stead, and Arthur Stringer, were presenting the West in terms suggestive of a garden awaiting cultivation. This garden motif in their descriptions is reminiscent of the "Garden of the World" myth earlier attached to the American plains, and may have grown out of it. Henry Nash Smith describes that myth as having ended in bitter disillusionment during the 1870's,[1] but its reappearance north of the border is not too surprising. The Canadian plains were offering a new promise of endless abundance. What is more significant for Canadian prairie fiction is that the garden and not the earlier "frontier myth" of the American West was the first unifying vision Canadian writers turned to as a way of ordering their perceptions of the new environment.

The literary histories on either side of the border seem in many ways directly opposed. On the American side, Smith says "The Wild West beyond the frontier lent itself readily to interpretation

in a literature developing the themes of natural nobility and physical adventure, but the agrarian West . ... proved quite intractable as literary material" (p. 211). The fiction of the Canadian West, by contrast, developed with the growth of a settled agrarian population and sought slightly different themes from the American. The reasons for this difference are worth some attention because they point to a great deal that is distinctive about Canadian prairie fiction.

The West to be found in English Canadian fiction is rarely a "frontier." If a "frontier" is taken to be that meeting point of advancing civilization and untamed nature, where civilized order confronts unordered wilderness, then there is no reason to expect one, since the frontier era was virtually over by the time the literature began. The fur traders and the missionaries had been operating in the West under what might be called frontier conditions for two hundred years by the time the first western novel, Begg's Dot it Down, was published in 1871. When most of the early novelists began to come west with the bulk of settlement from Ontario, Great Britain, and the American Middle West, they came into incredibly rigorous pioneer conditions, but not to the edge of a trackless wilderness. They had the sense of a plain patrolled by the North West Mounted Police, surveyed for settlement, with a railroad stretching out to cross it. They were not on the edge of anything; they were surrounded by something, and they took it to be the civilized order they had always known.

Nor was there much retrospective attention to the frontier condition in the literature. But then, for the most popular novelists, Ontario-born writers like Connor, McClung, Stead, and Stringer, it had

not been their frontier. The fur trade had been carried on largely from England and from Montreal, while the main thrust toward settlement, when it came, came from Ontario. The West was never a frontier of Ontario (or Upper Canada) in the sense that the American West was the frontier of that nation as it steadily expanded from the eastern seaboard. Both history and geography prevented such a continuous westward movement. The Canadian West was shaped separately to a greater extent and tied in loosely to Confederation with a railroad (and two armies) as a hinterland or a set of colonies of central Canada.

The implications of this manner of development for the literature are interesting. In 1854 an American publicist could say:

> The American mind will be brought to maturity along the chain of the great lakes, the banks of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and their tributaries in the far northwest. There, on the rolling plains, will be formed a republic of letters which, not governed like that on our seaboard, by the great literary powers of Europe, shall be free indeed.[2]

It would be hard to imagine anyone in central Canada saying this about the early Canadian West. Central Canada was not looking to an advancing frontier to provide its identity or mature its character. There was little demand for a frontier myth in the Canadian consciousness of the time. Central Canada was not, of course, an Atlantic nation seeking independence, but a landlocked nation struggling to maintain its British character. Because the West was hardly more to her than a source of land, markets, and raw materials, the settlers -- and the novelists -- could not think of themselves as being at the source of historical forces shaping their nation.

As a result, whatever ideals of nationhood appear in the fiction of the early Twentieth Century are attuned to the preservation of an empire which has already asserted its dominion over the land, and which has its center somewhere else. Frontier values of individualism and egalitarianism are evident, but greatly tempered by faith in a higher, intangible order.

A statue in the Alberta Provincial Museum provides a suggestive emblem for the prairie pioneer as he is found in the fiction. All in bronze, a man kneels, holding the bridle of a horse which bears his wife and infant child. The larger - than - life proportions of the statue, the obvious strength of the man, the gazes fixed ahead into the distance, all speak of the romance of pioneering. And there is something redemptive about this new beginning. The grouping of man, woman, child, and patient beast suggests a nativity scene, but in this epiphany what the man kneels before with bared head is a squared metal survey stake with its cryptic notation of township, section, and quarter section. It is tempting to compare the pioneer with the Indians aghast before Young's syllabics spelling "God" on the rock. The pioneer seems to be reacting as much to the man-made abstraction of "Land" as to the land as natural surroundings. This faith in an intangible order seems to be a large part of the spirit of empire in the Canadian West. It extends from Henry Kelsey confidently making treaties between the Cree and Blackfoot in 1690 to the uncanny devotion of the Mounted Police, to the attitudes of Connor's and McClung's heroes and heroines. Here again there is a sharp contrast with the very concrete and immediate conception of empire evident in the American West.

The conception of the West as a garden, not necessarily Eden itself but one in which the natural order is closely identified with divine order, is entirely consistent with this general devotion to an unseen human order. The heroes who inhabit this fictional garden are not usually the frontiersmen of American or French Canadian fiction, the Daniel Boones or voyageurs torn by the conflicting impulses to preserve the wild freedom of the natural state or to impose a human order on the apparent chaos of the wilderness. The heroes are sometimes settlers but often Mounties, ministers or teachers, figures who are firmly set in and symbolic of an encompassing order.

As a phase in the struggle of the Canadian imagination to humanize the new environment and assimilate it to an artistic form, the garden myth had immediate advantages. The writers needed a way of seeing the land in relation to man before it could take on meaningful shape and acquire significant detail. Descriptively the land begins to emerge during this period with more convincing particularity. The dangers to which this myth exposed the imagination became clear only when it faded, leaving a bitter residue. One of the greatest dangers was the assumption of a land contained within a settled pattern of culture. It obscured the fact that the people's relationship to environment had changed or needed to change. They continued to assume, far too often, that they could ignore what was there and impose their will upon it. The attractions of the myth could make them forget that it was only precariously in touch with the realities of the new environment, which had still to be reckoned with. In later prairie fiction the results of this disparity between the imaginative and the

physical order are represented in the common figure of the lone man confronting the forces of the environment, encumbered by a cultural order which does more to constrict than to support him.

The popular writers of the early Twentieth Century were prolific, by Canadian standards, and the quality of their work uneven. Neither individual novels nor any one or two novelists stand out as representative of the time. The reader will gather more from a composite sketch of their fictional garden and the real snakes lurking in it than he could from separate studies of the winters. The following passages are from R.J.C. Stead's The Homesteaders, published in 1916, but almost any of the novels could provide similar descriptions.

> It was a life of hard, persistent work -- of loneliness, privation, and hardship. But it was also a life of courage, of health, of resourcefulness, of a wild, exhilarating freedom found only in God's open spaces.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And at night, when the moon rose in wonderful whiteness and purity, wrapping field and ravine in a riot of silver, the strange, irresistible, unanswerable longing of the great plains stole down upon them, and they knew that here indeed was life in its fulness -- a participation in the Infinite, indefinable, but all-embracing everlasting.[3]

Clearly Stead sees the pioneer as taking man's rightful place in a divine, beneficent order. He gives us the romance of pioneering in terms of the infinite, the eternal and the ineffable, traditionally the terms and the concerns of romance. As a way of relating man to the land, Stead's romantic vision is better than most, not only because he refuses to overlook the hardships, but because he senses the divine in an appeal which is peculiar to the plains. Ralph Connor is more typical, finding the lure of the West in the more hospitable foothills area of southern Alberta.

There are, of course, exceptions to the prevailing view. Harold Bindloss, for example, in his Lorimer of the Northwest describes a young Englishman's first sight of the prairie:

> Spring, I was told, was very late that year, and the plains rolled before us to the horizon a dreary white wilderness streaked by willow-swale, with at first many lonely lakes rippling a bitter steely-blue under the blasts, while crackling ice fringed their shores.[4]

But Bindloss, while he was a more capable writer than most, never seemed to find in the prairie any distinctive spirit of place; his books remain English adventures in a strange land.

Another quality of the garden which accompanies the harmony with a divine order is a moral simplicity -- an innocence which is not necessarily purity but an absence of civilized sophistication. As the wise old doctor in Nellie McClung's Purple Springs says, "this big West is new and crude and distinct -- only the primary colours are used in the picture, there are no half tones, no shadows, and above all -- or perhaps I should say behind all -- no background. A thing is good or bad -- black or white -- blue or red."[5] This is essentially the moral perspective which underlies the fiction of Stead and Stringer too, and in the work of Connor and McClung particularly it is accompanied by the sort of naive social conscience which provides the complex human problems of the West with superficially logical solutions like prohibition, industry, thrift, and simple piety. It is also the moral perspective of most sentimental romance, which was quite predictably the genre in which these writers worked.

The old doctor's contention that there is "no background" refers mainly to the removal of the Settlers from their social and family contexts, but it suggests another of the Edenic qualities of the fictional West of this period. It has no past. The land might have been created by the government surveyors. Some of the Mounted Police stories, such as H.E.R. Steele's Spirit of Iron[6] and Connor's Corporal Cameron and Patrol of the Sundance Trail[7] depict pre-settlement encounters with the native people, but the popular fiction generally gives the impression that nothing happened until the white settlers arrived. Indian and Metis characters are rare, and like the villains of Connor's police stories, usually degenerate creatures destined for a merciful extinction. This loss of the past can now be seen as a measure of how dangerously out of touch with the land this garden vision of the West was. True, it implied a harmony with nature, but in a millennial perfection, not in the sense of man as a continuing part of the great cycle of life on the plains. The settlers' millennial vision could remain more important than the land under their feet. Among the writers of this period, only Stead noticed that the vision would lead to disillusionment, and even he does not take up the subject until later in Smoking Flax (1924) and Grain (1926), which will be treated in Chapter IV.

It should be noted, too, that the garden remains solidly British in most of the fiction, despite the increasing use of the term "Canadian." The novelists and our popular tradition have been effective enough that we do not at first question this assumption in the fiction, but by 1926, in the rural prairies where the stories are set, only 46.5%

of the people gave their racial origins as British.[8] We find some light-hearted raillery at the English remittance man or the green farm pupil, but the essentials of the "Canadian" nationality are assumed to be the English language and the British cultural tradition. Like the Indians, "foreigners" (immigrants of non-British origins) can sometimes be amiable creatures, but are usually distasteful if not vicious. There are few exceptions. Edward McCourt gives Connor undeserved credit for a broadminded treatment of the middle-European immigrant in his The Foreigner published in 1909.[9] McCourt contends that Connor describes the Slavic community of North Winnipeg "with sympathy and understanding based on acute observation and instinctive Christian charity,"[10] without apparently noticing the heavily condescending tone. Here, for example, is Connor's description of how the typical Slavic immigrant reacted to prosperity:

> . . . he rapidly sloughed off with his foreign clothes his foreign speech and manner of life, and his foreign ideals as well, and became a Canadian citizen, distinguished from his cosmopolitan fellow citizen only by the slight difficulty he displayed with some of the consonants of the language. (p. 157)

There may be acute observation behind such comments, but there is also enough smugness to evoke the worst connotations of the term "Christian charity." McCourt notes that Connor allows his hero Kalman to emerge from a sinister, sub-human slum "to win the heart and hand of a beautiful Anglo-Saxon girl -- no less than the daughter of a peer" (p. 74). What he overlooks is that Kalman is prepared for this apotheosis by being purged of his foreignness, symbolized by the death of his bomb-throwing nihilist father. The balance of Connor's sympathy for ethnic minorities

can be seen in the comments of his benevolent missionary, Parson Brown, who says, " 'These people here exist as an undigested foreign mass. They must be digested and absorbed into the body politic. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada" (p. 156).

To judge by the fiction, Connor voiced no more than the popular conviction -- and the intentions of the public school system, for that matter[11] -- but there is an occasional exception. E.A.W. Gill's Love in Manitoba is a story of a Scandinavian community in the "Grove" country of northern Manitoba, written in 1911, but in a style of low-key realism uncommon at that time. There is wisdom and sympathy in Gill's treatment of the English and non-English characters alike, and a stringent wit in his rejection of bigotry. He includes a comic racist, the postmaster, Old Man Dawson, of whom it is said that when a Swedish settler is on trial, "He hinted darkly that, by the time the trial was over, the Pope o' Rome would be seriously compromised; the Swedes were 'furriners'; 'furriners,' in default of evidence to the contrary, were clearly 'Romans,' and every 'Roman' is the accredited agent of the Pope and the devil."[12] Gill's most worthless character is Roland Vale, an effete young English farm pupil, his most worthy is Jim Hardie, a Canadian farmer. His villain, unfortunately, is an Indian, but in most respects Gill's outlook is a good deal more liberal and more appropriate to the mixed population of the West than Connor's solidly British assumptions.

Of the figures who inhabit the fictional garden, the most characteristic, though not the most numerous, are the Mounted Policemen,

the ministers, and the school teachers, suggestive of the secular, sacred, and cultural aspects of the encompassing order. In Corporal Cameron Ralph Connor presents what is probably the central archetype of the Mountie, a slim youngster in a scarlet tunic and pill-box cap who walks into a gambling den where a desperado is flourishing his gun:

> "Put it down there, my man. Do you hear?" The voice was still smooth, but through the silky tones there ran a fibre of steel. Still the desperado stood gazing at him. "Quick, do you hear?" There was a sudden sharp ring of imperious, of overwhelming authority, and, to the amazement of the crowd of men who stood breathless and silent about, there followed one of those phenomena which experts in psychology delight to explain, but which no man can understand. Without a word the gambler slowly laid upon the table his gun, upon whose handle were many notches, the tally of human lives it had accounted for in the hands of this same desperado.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Now, listen!" gravely continued the youngster. "I give you twenty-four hours to leave this post, and if after twenty-four hours you are found here it will be bad for you. Get out!"
>
> The man, still silent, slunk out of the room. Irresistible authority seemed to go with the word that sent him forth, and rightly so, for behind that word lay the full weight of Great Britain's mighty empire. It was Cameron's first experience of the North West Mounted Police, that famous corps of frontier riders who for more than a quarter of a century have ridden the marches of Great Britain's territories in the far north-west land, keeping intact the Pax Britannica amid the wild turmoil of pioneer days. To the North West Mounted Police and to the pioneer missionary it is due that Canada has never had within her borders what is known as a "wild and wicked West."[13]

The Mountie, as Connor describes him, is an apt embodiment of the spirit of empire. It is important that he does more than maintain the law; he "maintains the right," which is a less tangible but far more awesome and pervasive thing. The uncanny success of the NWMP in the

early West and in the Klondike is, of course, a matter of record, though we can gather from histories of the force that its members were more effective when isolated from the direct power of empire and working with the people they were policing.[14] When the "right" came to include the unpopular liquor laws, the interest of the whites, and the property of the C.P.R., their success was not as consistent.

There were, eventually, various images of the Mountie, because the reputation of the force generated an international literary industry in Mountie stories. Most of them deserve little attention here, partly because they remain peripheral to the literature of the West, and partly because they are, for the most part, worse than Connor's. American writers like James Oliver Curwood peopled the North with U.S. marshalls in scarlet tunic.[15] The English writer Ridgwell Cullum included Mounties in his stories set in Canada, but his characters all come through as Englishmen in the American West.[16] Another English writer, E.J. Lyttleton, writing under the pseudonym "G.B. Lancaster," creates both psychological depth and authenticity of setting, but her tales are of the North rather than the West.[17] The Canadian writer S.A. White was also setting his stories in the North at this stage of his career, though he did later use the West as a setting.[18] Gilbert Parker's western stories could hardly be said to take place anywhere in particular, but in Pierre and his People he does create one character, a Sergeant Fones, who has the same inhuman devotion to duty we find in the classic Mountie of later fiction.[19] Harwood Steele, son of the remarkable Sam Steele, and himself a veteran of the force, became a regular contributor to the

RCMP veteran's magazine, Scarlet and Gold. His Spirit of Iron, very much in the Connor tradition, is loosely based on police records, but its hero, Hector Adair, is hopelessly idealized.[20] None of the Mountie fiction of this period can be counted a definite advance from Connor's polite stories. Two notable features redeem the tales of Corporal Cameron's exploits. Like the strike-breaking scene which is based fairly closely upon an arrest effected by one Sergeant Billy Fury in the Kicking Horse Pass in 1885,[21] the incidents Connor uses are reasonably authentic, and Connor's zest for scenes of adventurous action is contagious.

Connor also gives us the figure of the minister in his creation of young Moore in The Sky Pilot.[22] The minister, like the Mountie, had appeared in nineteenth-century fiction but had never been developed into a memorable character. Moore is superficially alien, unsuited to the West:

> He was very slight, very young, very innocent, with a face that might do for an angel, except for the touch of humour in it, but which seemed strangely out of place among the rough, hard faces that were to be seen in the Swan Creek Country. (p. 46)

He is clearly all that is missing from the West in a broadly spiritual sense, all things aesthetic, ethereal, and somehow feminine. His purpose is to set up a church, but also to civilize the West. He must contend with all that is crude, vulgar and brutal in the raw settlements, and he must do it in a manly way. The "Pilot" wins the respect of the coarse ranch hands by being a better baseball pitcher,

and he outfaces a saloonful of scoffers in the same way the young Mountie quiets a roomful of gamblers.

In a Connor story, the reformation of the half-wild westerners is inevitable. The effect is romantic, sentimental, and didactic, but Connor seems to have sensed intuitively a power in the western experience which did not fit into his polite civilized narratives, and which he was never able to articulate consciously. For all the sublime faith in order, spiritual and temporal, which underlies Connor's sentimental plots, there appears unexpectedly in his writings a latent anarchic power, emanating from the land and taking the form of unregenerate natural man (or woman). The ultimate test of Moore's success, for example, is winning the faith of Gwen, the young daughter of "The Old Timer" of Swan Creek. She is a complete child of nature, wild and firey as her own streaming red hair, wilful and wicked in an outwardly asexual way. In some sense she is the spirit of Connor's West. She can be won over only after a riding accident confines her permanently to bed, when only the "Pilot's" Christianity can save her from despair. Connor was so pleased with this episode that he published it separately as Gwen, an Idyll of the Canyon in the same year as he published The Sky Pilot.[23] The canyon, a deep cleft in the prairie grown up with lush, exotic vegetation (an image of submerged sexuality which mercifully seems to have escaped the good minister) becomes a symbol for the spiritual beauty that can grow out of physical pain, and one which Connor later used as a kind of parable in his sermons.[24]

Once the "Pilot" has Gwen safely confined to her bed, he makes frequent visits to what is referred to as "Gwen's canyon" in order to tell her how beautiful and soothing it is. Here is Connor's description:

> As we went down into the cool depths the spirit of the canyon came to meet us and took The Pilot in its grip. He rode in front, feasting his eyes on all the wonders in that storehouse of beauty. Trees of many kinds deepened the shadows of the canyon. Over us waved the big elms that grew up here and there out of the bottom, and around their feet clustered low cedars and hemlocks and balsams, while the sturdy, rugged oaks and delicate, trembling poplars clung to the rocky sides and clambered up and out to the canyon's sunny lips. Back of it all, the great black rocks, decked with mossy bits and clinging things, glistened cool and moist between the parting trees. From many an oozy nook the dainty clematis and columbine shook out their bells, and lower down, from beds of many-coloured moss the late windflower and maiden-hair and tiny violet lifted up brave, sweet faces. (p. 164)

The "Pilot" emerges from this rather suggestive experience saying "That does me good. . . . This was Gwen's best spot." The kind of idyllic retreat Connor is attempting to create is evident from the vegetation he uses, importing elm and oak trees from his native Ontario, and cedar and hemlock from the mountains, but the sexual suggestion remains with the canyon through the story. Gwen is patronized by Lady Charlotte, a grand, cultured, eastern lady whose great sorrow is that she is childless. In the same spirit of apparent innocence, Connor has Gwen ask Lady Charlotte if she has a canyon too, to which the lady replies, "and there are no flowers, Gwen, not one, nor seeds, nor soil, I fear" (p. 249).

The humour of the situation (whether conscious or not) is less significant than the sexual energies associated with the land

through Gwen, which come through clearly even if they are not specifically intended. They provide one of the earliest indications that the kind of romance being written about the prairies at this stage had been too chaste, sunlit, and superficial to assimilate all the darker impulses the prairie has been conveying to the imaginations of men from the time of the earliest travellers like Grant and Butler.

Nellie McClung's Pearly Watson is the prototype of the school teacher in prairie fiction. Mrs. McClung devotes practically no attention to Pearly's teaching, but then the fictional prairie teacher is commonly seen more as a general cultural force in the community. Pearly does not, in fact, become a teacher until the third book in which she appears, but she is engaged in good works and moral crusades from her first appearance in Sowing Seeds in Danny in 1908.[25] Like the Mountie and the minister, the teacher is against drink, brutality, and idleness, but for slightly different reasons. In the fictional garden, her particular role seems to be as guardian of the virtues of decency, human compassion, and respect for the "finer things in life," virtues which seem particularly threatened by the freedom and disorder of the West. Since they are threatened chiefly by male weakness, it is appropriate that Pearly and her creator are crusaders for women's rights. The simple didactic message of Mrs. McClung's stories is a call for prohibition and female suffrage, which are assumed to be the solutions to all social abuses, including war.[26] Pearly leads the "Band of Hope" (a gathering of school children assembled to swear they will never touch liquor), she saves neglected wives from their tyrannical husbands, and in Purple Springs[27] she leads the women to a dramatic overthrow of

the provincial government. In McClung's writings, as in Connor's, there is the implication that what is needed is a marriage of East and West, with the civilized East softening and humanizing the virile but intemperate West. The troubled domestic life of this marriage is portrayed very well -- the values of the teacher are essentially eastern -- but the reconciliation she insists upon is not very convincing. Little Pearly is too obviously an instrument of Mrs. McClung's didactic purpose.

What remains of permanent value in Nellie McClung's writings is the tone of pragmatic anti-romance which occasionally wins out over the sentimentality that mars much of her work. This anti-romantic tone dominates the first half of her first book, Sowing Seeds in Danny, which was written before she saw her fiction as a useful means of moral instruction.[28] Her first gently ironic sketches could have provided Leacock with a model for his Sunshine Sketches. Like Leacock, she exercises a whimsical yet deftly satiric wit in arranging a few type-characters to embody the essence of a small Manitoba town. Mrs. Burton Francis, for example, is full of philanthropic zeal but hopelessly aloft in her theories about sowing the seeds of virtue in the hearts of the poor. After showing her beleaguered charwoman Mrs. Watson, who is the mother of nine, a book called The Beauty of Motherhood, she enters in her diary: "Dec 7, 1903. Talked with one woman today re: Beauty of Motherhood. Recommended Dr. Parker's book. Believe good done" (p. 8). Mrs. McClung, in these first hundred pages of her work, was a worthy forerunner of W.O. Mitchell as a prairie humorist, and the poems Pearly writes could be set down anywhere in Paul Hiebert's Sarah Binks:

The little lams are beautiful,
    There cotes are soft and nice,
The little calves have ringworm,
    And the 2-year olds have lice!

It must be very nasty,
    But to worrie, what's the use:
Better be cam and cheerful,
    and appli tobaka jooce. (p. 221)

Unfortunately Mrs. McClung chose rather to follow the spirit of these verses than to develop the human comedy they represent. The last half of Sowing Seeds is unbearably maudlin.

The figures logically at the center of the garden of the West, the pioneers themselves, are best represented by R.J.C. Stead in a succession of his early novels from The Bail Jumper in 1914 to Neighbours in 1922.[29] They are at the center, but do not, like the Mountie, the minister, and the teacher, represent the intangible order of the garden. This may be why it is in the portrayal of the pioneers that we see a good deal more evidence of the weaknesses which would eventually discredit the whole garden myth, in fiction as well as in fact. Stead shows us an array of the dangers besetting the pioneer's vision of "participation in the Infinite, indefinable, but all-embracing everlasting" on the plains. Stead's second novel, The Homesteaders, could be taken as the central romance of western settlement.[30] His main characters, John and Mary Harris, are ideal pioneers. He is an Ontario school teacher, fired with ambition, strong, poor, and proud. She is gentle, equally idealistic, a little romantic, but strong in her softer woman's way. They settle in 1882 in an area Professor A.T. Elder identifies as near Cartwright, Manitoba, where Stead himself grew up, and their life "of courage, of health, of resourcefulness" earns them a prosperous

farm over the next twenty-five years.[31]

It would seem that the ideal is being realized, but Stead shows that success is fatal to the ideal. For Harris, the "unanswerable longing of the great plains" has become an insatiable desire for more land. We see him after twenty-five years, brutalized by work and crass ambition, negligent of all the finer traits of his own character and of the human needs of his family:

> Harris did not know that his gods had fallen, that his ideals had been swept away; even as he sat at supper this summer evening, with his daughter's arms about his neck, he felt that he was still bravely, persistently, pressing on toward the goal, all unaware that years ago he had left that goal like a lighthouse on a rocky shore, and was now sweeping along with the turbulent tide of Mammonism. (p. 88)

Because of the change in John Harris, his household assumes a pattern which will reappear again and again in the work of Grove, Martha Ostenso, Arthur Storey, and others. It includes the "prairie patriarch" filled with the righteousness of his own purpose, but in fact a land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant. The farm women are subjugated, culturally and emotionally starved, and filled with a smouldering rebellion. Stead rescues his characters from this unwholesome situation by the use of another recurrent motif, the journey westward toward the mountains. While the daughter, Beulah, goes West in the proper spirit, seeking more abundant life, Harris goes in search of the greater gains to be made in land speculation in the opening province of Alberta. He is under the influence of the villain, Hiram Riles, who is completely characterized by the description of his journey west: "Riles found the

journey westward a tiresome affair. His was a soul devoid of enthusiasm over Nature's wealth or magnitude, and the view of the endless prairie excited in him no emotion other than a certain vague covetousness" (p. 164). The quest leads only to a melodramatic intrigue in the foothills of the Rockies, but like so much of the westering in prairie fiction, it is an episode in the inevitable journey toward disillusionment and self-discovery. Harris is brought to his senses and regains his original ideals.

In Stead, a response to the land, not as property or power but as "Nature," is a reliable index of character, and the land as setting is responsive to man in an elemental and romantic way. Crucial scenes of emotional turmoil are commonly answered by storms, as when Dennison Grant[32] is deciding he must lose the woman he loves for the sake of her child, or when Raymond Burton in The Bail Jumper is taking flight at the cost of both his desire and his sense of honour: "But to the fugitive the threatened storm meant nothing. The warfare of the elements could tear no deeper than the warfare of his soul" (p. 161). At this stage in his career Stead was not always as subtle as he might have been. Similarly, passion has its reflection in material fires, and water is closely associated with love and the softer emotions, with all that is regenerative and with the mysteries of femininity. If some of Stead's elemental imagery is laboured, his water imagery develops gradually into an organic function of his setting in the last two novels, The Smoking Flax and Grain.[33] Stead was again working with a vein of imagery which would continue into later prairie fiction. It seems that water, like wind, is a rich imaginative resource on the great dry sea

of the plains.

Stead's novels also include the theme of a marriage of East and West, of culture and vigour, which can be followed from John Mackie to its ironic exposure in Robert Kroetsch's novels where the relationship is shown as an exploitive one -- more a fornication than a marriage. Stead expresses the need for this marriage in the cultural degeneration of his ideal pioneer, John Harris. The one-time schoolmaster is even reduced to speaking barbarous non-standard English. In The Bail Jumper, Burton loves the refined, eastern girl, Myrtle Vane: Dave Eldon in The Cow Puncher[34] improves himself for the love of Irene Hardy, the daughter of an eastern doctor; Jean Lane in Neighbours refuses to accept the narrator, Frank Hall, until he has broadened his mind with readings in English literature; Cal Beach in The Smoking Flax brings eastern sensibilities to bear on the barren conditions of the western farm wife. The marriage is usually effected, and that is in keeping with the generally robust, optimistic tone of Stead's early novels.

For the image of the pioneer woman, we can turn to Arthur Stringer, whose presentation of her is psychologically fuller and deeper if not more plausible than Stead's. Stringer also envisions a marriage of East and West, but from the female point of view. In his prairie trilogy[35] the narrator, Chaddy, is an eastern socialite who at first responds rapturously to the prairie as garden and to her strong, taciturn Scots-Canadian husband, Duncan McKail. But here, as in Stead, Mammon is the false god that leads McKail away from his wife. Duncan becomes crass and insensitive, eventually forsaking the farm for a somewhat sordid and vulgar life of real estate speculation in Calgary. In a

later novel, The Mud Lark, Stringer explores another danger to the prairie wife.[36] His heroine-narrator Joan Alicia Eustis, an aristocratic but penniless English lady, is the mail-order bride of James Bentley Gilson, an Alberta farmer. He is the epitome of strong, deep, inarticulate manhood, depicted as believing that to speak of his feelings would cheapen them. But the woman has an unexpected rival in the land itself. She reflects that "women don't seem to count much in this country. It's the land that coaxes and woos men. This fertile northern prairie is still man-hungry. It calls for men, must have men. Millions of virgin acres are waiting for them, like brides in a million beds. And the woman who mates up with one of these wheat-growers seems merely a bridesmaid to a wider sort of marriage, the union of a worker with his land" (pp. 135-136).

The suggestions of displaced sexuality become comic at times, as Gilson sleeps in a back room with his prize seed wheat rather than with his bride, and when the woman's jealousy becomes more explicitly sexual: "During a lull in the rain I could even sniff a vague aroma from that mistress of his, a soft and earthy and seminal smell from the sleeping acres of green that stirred and swayed voluptuously in the humid darkness" (pp. 299-300). One begins to wonder if Stringer, like Connor, has lost control of his imagery when it turns out that the villain who is trying to steal Gilson's seed wheat is "Bull" McDoel, aided by his willing tool "Spike" Forgan. But in one respect Stringer's identification of woman and the soil is a variant upon a recurrent theme in more accomplished prairie fiction. Judith Gare in Ostenso's Wild Geese and Judith West in As For Me and My House come immediately to mind.

They are imagistically identified with the soil, and like the land, they will never be entirely subdued.

Stringer may also have made direct contributions to Ross's novel. His Chaddy McKail, along with Carol Kennicott in Sinclair Lewis' Mainstreet, may have provided an early model for Mrs. Bentley in As For Me and My House. There is no evidence that Ross ever read Stringer; the characters touch only at a few points. Yet if one considers some other details of Stringer's prairie trilogy, one cannot easily believe that the similarities are pure coincidence. Chaddy begins a letter in The Prairie Wife which soon turns into a diary very like Mrs. Bentley's. The stories are both in the tradition mentioned earlier of the confessions of a refined sensibility exposed to the rudeness and cultural sterility of the pioneer West. While at first Chaddy's attitude and disposition are optimistic and frivolous, as the trilogy progresses she begins to sound more and more like Mrs. Bentley. Entry after entry begins with something like "Duncan, it's plain to see, is still in the doldrums. He is uncommunicative and moody and goes about his work with a listlessness which is more and more disturbing to me," (p. 80) or "Dinky-Dunk is on his dignity. He has put a fence around himself to keep me at a distance" (p. 115). There are even times when, like Philip Bentley, he retreats to his study. The McKail marriage deteriorates into the same sterile tension we find in the Bentley household, and the woman's possessiveness is implicated in both situations. When Chaddy finds Duncan in California at the end of a tragic love affair, she says "He looked leaner and frailer and less robustious than of old. But in my heart of hearts I liked him that way. It left him the helpless and unprotesting victim

of that run-over maternal instinct of mine which took wayward joy in mothering what it couldn't master."[37] Mrs. Bentley is more subtle, but admits early in her diary to a similar impulse toward Philip: "He's a very adult, self-sufficient man, who can't bear to be fussed or worried over; and sometimes, broodless old woman that I am, I get impatient being just his wife, and start in trying to mother him too."[38]

Like the Bentleys, the McKails have their outside romantic interests. His is the pale young schoolmistress, Alsina Teeswater, whom Chaddy drives from the house because Duncan has seduced her. She has a superficial resemblance to Judith West, though unlike Judith she does manage to go to the city and win the man. Chaddy's first outside interest is non-serious -- a gaunt and gauche young scholar named Gershom Binks, who knows everything but understands nothing. He offers, on every occasion, bits of useless pedantry such as the fact that the piano "was really evolved from the six-stringed harps of the fourth Egyptian dynasty."[39] Unlike Paul's etymologies in Ross's novel, Gershom's pedantries do not reveal his emotions or his character beyond the superficial fact that he is helpless in the western setting. In general, the similarities between Stringer's fiction and Ross's are interesting mainly as they reveal how much more Ross can do with a technique or with an image that has virtually become a cliché.

While much of the early twentieth-century fiction dramatizes the various temptations in the garden, none really raises the possibility that the garden ideal is a dangerous illusion in itself. Nellie McClung comes close to raising it in Painted Fires in 1921.[40] Her title itself is intended to mean "illusions," but Mrs. McClung is writing specifically

about the illusions of a "foreigner." Her heroine, Helmi Milander, is a spirited Finnish girl, wholesome and virtuous, but at times wilful and passionate, by far the most attractive of Mrs. McClung's women. She emigrates with a vision of the New World derived from a sentimental post-card her aunt has given her entitled "Auntie's Garden." Helmi in Winnipeg is led into trouble by her idyllic impression of the New World, but is able to escape farther west, and her flight from evil is again archetypal. As she rides the train West, "She wondered, if one kept on going, going, going, would every disagreeable thing fall away, every sin and every sadness?" (p. 119). It seems at times as though Mrs. McClung is offering Helmi as an image of the general western illusions of the time, but the plot denies the implications of her imagery. After cruel misfortunes Helmi finds her happiness, settled in the foothills on the banks of "English River," well within the boundaries of the larger western illusion.

Possibly for the writers of the early 1920's an idyllic view of the prairie became all the more important as they saw the industrialization of agriculture begin. Relinquishing that illusion would have been especially difficult for didactic writers like Mrs. McClung, who believed that instilling the best values was more important than literary honesty. Yet the myth of the garden, however unfortunate it may have been as a practical view of the plains, must be seen for its value as a literary image. There is evidence in this period, especially in the work of Stead and Stringer, of the development of archetypes which will later enable the prairie novelist's imagination to assimilate the rich particularity of prairie existence. There is also evidence of the slow

growth of the type of realism which characterizes the fiction from 1925 onward.[41] From the beginning Stead was developing the descriptive techniques that matured in Grain (1926). This passage from The Bail Jumper (1914), for example, could easily be attributed to the later Stead -- or to Grove:

> Suddenly a shape loomed through the grey mist of the night. The horses lurched back upon the double trees, their trace-chains clattering with the slack. The shape took form; a frightened team were seen plunging in the deep snow by the roadside; the vehicles interlocked. (p. 8).

In such isolated passages, there is economy, rhythm, movement and a sense of sound in the language as full as Stead ever achieved. And the minute circumstantial realism found in parts of The Smoking Flax would lead quite logically to the perceptions and the conclusions that follow in Grain.

Further, if the garden world was a far from adequate unifying imaginative conception of the prairie, the idea of an Edem-like place has never entirely disappeared from the fiction. It remains an underlying assumption in the popular tradition of prairie writing, and in the more seriously "literary" novels it has its place as an ironic image of human illusions, like Doc Murdoch's lush garden in Kroetsch's The Works of My Roaring, or Neil Fraser's naive dream of the Peace River Country in Music at the Close. It seems to be one of the poles of the prairie imagination. Kroetsch, in his Alberta, describes the people as "locked between dream and nightmare," and the dream is as real and as essential as the nightmare.[42] The fiction of the early Twentieth Century, then, may have remained too naively within a dream of the West, but it reflected

certain very real and enduring qualities of the prairie mind.

Footnotes

[1]Virgin Land (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), p. 193.

[2]Quoted in Edwin Fussell, American Literature and the American West (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p.11.

[3]The Homesteaders (Toronto: Musson, 1916), pp. 58 and 61.

[4]Lorimer of the Northwest (New York: A.L. Burt, 1909), p. 28.

[5]Purple Springs (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1921), pp. 37-38.

[6]Spirit-Of-Iron (New York: A.L. Burt, 1923).

[7]Corporal Cameron (Toronto: The Westminster Company, 1912) and The Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914).

[8]C.A. Dawson and Eva R. Younge, Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process (Toronto: Macmillan, 1940), pp. 31-32.

[9]The Foreigner (Toronto: The Westminster Co., 1909).

[10]The Canadian West in Fiction, rev. ed. (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 74.

[11]Dawson and Younge, p. 34.

[12]Love in Manitoba (Toronto: Musson, n.d.), p. 287.

[13]Corporal Cameron, pp. 307-308.

[14]Ronald Atkin, Maintain the Right (London: Macmillan, 1973), passim.

[15]See, for example, Steele of the Royal Mounted (1911; rpt. Montreal: Pocketbooks, 1946).

[16]See, for example, The Story of Foss River Ranch (New York: A.L. Burt, 1903).

[17]See, for example, The Law-bringers (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913).

[18]The Stampeder (Toronto: William Briggs, 1910) and Law of the North (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1913), for example, are northern, while Northwest Law (New York: Phoenix, 1942) and North of the Border (New York: Phoenix, 1940) are set in the West.

[19]Pierre and His People (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1897).

[20]Introduction to Spirit - of -Iron.

[21]Atkin, p. 184.

[22]The Sky Pilot (Toronto: The Westminster Co., 1899). This book technically belongs to the Nineteenth Century, but in spirit it cannot reasonably be separated from the rest of Connor's work in the Twentieth Century.

[23]Gwen, An Idyll of the Canyon (Toronto: Felming H. Revell, 1899).

[24]Charles W. Gordon, Postscript to Adventure (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938), p. 151.

[25]Sowing Seeds in Danny (Toronto: William Briggs, 1908).

[26]See, for example, The Next of Kin (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1917).

[27]Purple Springs (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1921).

[28]Nellie McClung, The Stream Runs Fast (1945; rpt. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1965), p. 75.

[29]The Bail Jumper (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914) and Neighbours (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922).

[30]The Homesteaders (Toronto: Musson, 1916).

[31]"Western Panorama: Settings and Themes in Robert J.C. Stead," Canadian Literature, 17 (Summer 1963), pp. 44-56.

[32]Dennison Grant (Toronto: Musson, 1920).

[33]The Smoking Flax (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1924) and Grain (1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

[34]The Cow Puncher (Toronto: Musson, 1918).

[35]The Prairie Wife (New York: A.L. Burt, 1915), The Prairie Mother (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920).

[36]The Mud Lark (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931).

[37]Prairie Mother, p. 344.

[38]As For Me and My House (1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. 4.

[39]The Prairie Child, p. 42.

[40]Painted Fires (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1925).

[41]Thomas Saunders' statement in the Introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Grain (1926; rpt. Toronto: McCllelland and Stewart, 1969), p. vi, that there was little in Stead's early work that "gave any indication of what was to follow in Grain," is a careless generalization. Professor Elder's survey of Stead's themes amply illustrates that, quite aside from the evident development of Stead's style.

[42]The Words of My Roaring (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 155. Alberta (Toronto, Macmillan, 1968), p. 7.

CHAPTER IV

ALIENATION FROM THE LAND

Historian W.L. Morton describes the 1920's in Canada as Janus-like, facing back to a rural agricultural past and forward to an era of urban industrialization.[1] By the late 1950's that industrialization is an accomplished fact in the minds of Canadians as well as in the cities of Canada. The intervening period is one of transition when the machinery for industrialization exists and yet rural agrarian ideals survive for a generation or more. On the prairies in particular, the mid-1920's are the turning-point Morton describes; settlement is more or less complete, and the process of industrializing agriculture has just begun. In the literature of the West the following transitional period is distinguished by the development of an accomplished realistic fiction of rural prairie life. The novels of Frederick Philip Grove, Sinclair Ross, and Edward McCourt come immediately to mind, but it should be remembered that the literary metamorphosis is no faster and no more thorough than the social transition. While prairie realism is the distinctive development of the period, there exists, from the 1920's onward, a separate popular tradition showing a strong continuity with the sentimental romances of Connor and McClung.

Both traditions share a mounting skepticism about the romance of pioneering, but in the light popular novels of writers such as Barbara Cormack and Ralph Allen, it appears as a pragmatic, anti-romantic tone

directed toward naive idealism or the fantasies of green young immigrants. The tone is reminiscent of McClung at her best, and as in McClung, the wickedness of the world is sentimentally redeemed, so that we know the world was never really fallen to begin with. The result is a form of gruff sentimental comedy which would never accept the garden view of the world implicit in the earlier romances, but keeps forever alive the possibility of restoring that garden. Man is not in any essential way alienated from his environment. His harmony with the land may be obscured by human error, but can be recovered if man is placed in touch with his basically good natural impulses. Bea Sondern and her children in Allen's The Peace River Country, for example, travel through the miserable poverty of Saskatchewan in the 1930's, yet with their vision of the Peace River Country always before them. It is never certain that they will reach their Eden, but it survives as a promise.[2]

In one direction the popular tradition extends to the uncomplicated Mounted Police stories of William Byron Mowery, S.A. White, James B. Hendryx, and Harwood Steele, in which wickedness is purged physically from the world. At the other extreme, where the two traditions meet, we find books like Wilfrid Eggleston's The High Plains.[3] Eggleston is so attentive to realistic details of the time and place that his book becomes dry with social history, though a very useful chronicle of the Palliser Triangle area of Alberta from about 1910 to 1920. Eggleston shows us a desert long before the 1930's, but instead of developing the implications of this condition, he allows his characters to escape to an irrigated farm in the Lethbridge area -- a restored bit of Eden.[4]

The developing prairie realism quite predictably favours a darker

view of prairie experiences than the popular tradition of sentimental comedy. If not a tragic view -- and Grove for one did refer to his view as tragic -- it at least conveys a painful sense of the human failure and waste, weakness and suffering in prairie life. The world it depicts is fallen, and not to be restored to a garden state by the sentimental repentance of a villain or the driving out of a comic scapegoat. It must be redeemed by suffering and sacrifice, like the death of Abe Spalding's favorite son Charlie, or of the pale young mother Judith in As For Me and My House. This realist tradition is of particular interest, not only because it includes most of the best fiction of the period, but because it demonstrates the next phase in the imagination's struggle to accommodate the prairie experience. This chapter is concerned with themes and imagery expressing man's general alienation from the land, particularly in the work of Grove, Stead, Ostenso, Ross, and McCourt; discussion of more specific imagery of hostility between the civilized imagination and the prairie landscape will be treated in the next chapter. Because of the quantity of excellent fiction written in this period, we will concentrate on a few representative novels rather than attempt to survey all the work of even the best writers.

In 1925 and 1926, three significant novels of the West were published: Frederick Philip Grove's Settlers of the Marsh, Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, and Robert J.C. Stead's Grain. They are often considered as a group because together they mark the beginning of that period of realism in prairie fiction which extends through the 1950's. As usual, the meaning of the term "realism" is uncertain in this context -- the three writers have little in common stylistically -- what they do

share is a recognition that in spite of material progress, the English-speaking settlers remain spiritually alienated from the land. Their work is both a decisive sign of disillusionment with the imaginative ordering of the prairie which produced the romance of pioneering and an admission that man has found no honest imaginative conception of the prairie that can place him in harmony with it.

Grove's treatment of the new theme develops from Settlers through Our Daily Bread (1928) and The Yoke of Life (1930) to Fruits of the Earth (1933), where he creates the most complete image of the new awareness. The central figure of the work, Abe Spalding, learns how much he has paid for his material prosperity in spiritual emptiness. In a chapter entitled simply "The Prairie," Abe attempts to understand his surroundings for the first time, and finds the experience disquieting:

> He had looked down at his feet; had seen nothing but the furrow; had considered the prairie only as a page to write the story of his life upon. His vision had been bounded by the lines of his farm; his farm had been floated on that prairie as the shipwright floats a vessel on the sea, looking not so much at the waves which are to batter it as at the fittings which secure the comfort of those within. But such a vessel may be engulfed by such a sea.[5]

The original problems of the settlers are all here, in this image. Abe fails to apprehend the natural surroundings; instead he imposes an imaginative order brought with him; the prairie retaliates by making him feel dislocated, unconnected, threatened. The main difference from earlier fictions is that Abe is made aware of his failure. The imaginative failure discussed earlier as a condition of the fiction of the Canadian West becomes, with Grove, an explicit theme. Much of the best fiction

in the period of prairie realism, including the work of Sinclair Ross, Edward McCourt and W.O. Mitchell, explores the varied and complex nature of this alienation from the land.

Grove, Stead and Ostenso are especially interesting as originators of this period of prairie realism because of the great differences in their ways of representing man's alienation. Stead is the only one whose techniques would fit consistently into any definition of realism. This may sound surprising after Stead's earlier romances, but not if we consider The Smoking Flax (1924).[6] There the techniques of circumstantial realism evident in his earliest work develop to a level equal to the creation of the oppressive circumstances of Gander Stake in Grain. The two novels are actually interwoven, sharing characters and events, but with points of view different enough to change the emphasis and the perspective in which we see those events. It is as though Stead had needed the earlier novel to discover that his real subject was not the romantic transient Calvin Beach, but the prosaic Manitoba farm boy, Gander Stake. Stead's is a patient, almost dogged fidelity to the daily circumstances of prairie life which work inexorably to stunt the growth of his hero, just as Gander's ill-fitting trousers induce a permanent hitch in his walk. But Gander remains more comic than pathetic in his deformity; he limps because he wants to wear a belt, like a man, and he is personally narrowed to the limits of the farm because he chooses a man's work over a child's growing up.

The tone of Grain, too, keeps Gander more comic than pathetic. Stead introduces an ironic distance between the reader and his hero, in the tradition of realists since Fielding. The tone is carefully estab-

lished in the first paragraph of the novel:

> Perhaps the term hero, with its suggestion of high enterprise, sits inappropriately upon the chief character of a somewhat commonplace tale; there was in Gander Stake little of that quality which is associated with the clash of righteous steel or the impact of noble purposes.[7]

The "somewhat commonplace tale" has come to the prairie to dispel the romance of pioneering, and Gander of course is of the unheroic generation after the pioneers, but there are still questions of heroism and purpose and romance hovering around the action of the novel. Gander cannot share the romantic urge to go to war, and so he loses his girl, Jo Burge, to a friend who returns as a wounded hero. Gander himself is called "hero" for saving a boy's life on the threshing machine, but his chief heroism is demanded in helping his friend back to health and relinquishing his claim to Jo Burge. Stead's irony does not produce a denial of the romantic but a tension between the commonplace and the romantic.

On the surface it would seem that Gander is a very prosaic son of the soil, alienated not from the land but from society in all its aspects which he identifies sarcastically with the drill sergeant's order to "form fours." Certainly Gander, by becoming involved in farm work at a very early age does miss out on most of the socializing activities of childhood, and quite willingly, as Stead says: "If he was being robbed of his childhood he was content to be robbed, for in its place he was being given manhood before its time. When he saw other boys of his age going to school he regarded them with pity and contempt" (p. 60). The manhood Gander wins is presumed to be in harmony with the

soil, and Stead describes his hero in that way: "Gander was a farmer born and bred; he had an eye for horses and a knack with machinery; the mysteries of the self-binder he had solved before he was nine" (p. 40). The phrase "an eye for horses" has a very precise application to Gander, who is without any impractical sentiment for them, and the emphasis is appropriately on machinery, which becomes the soul of Gander's farm life. Conspicuously Stead makes no mention of the land itself, and there is no evidence in action or description that Gander has any attachment to the soil, any sense of the rhythms of the season, or any response to the beauties of his surroundings. When Stead once refers to Gander as being close to nature (p. 120) and once says that "all his instincts were rooted deep in the soil" (p. 79), we must take what he says on faith. It is not until the young city girl, Jerry Chansley, has pointed it out to him that Gander notices the prairie sunset: "She had said the sky was beautiful. For the first time Gander watched it -- and wondered" (p. 151). Stead's partial misunderstanding of his own hero may be instructive; if Gander is an example of what it has come to mean to be "deeply rooted in the soil," then the people have lost even the conception of harmony with their surroundings.

Gander's nearest approach to loving the land is his love of exerting power over it through machines. Romantic sentiments which might have attached to the land or a woman are caught up in the power of machines. When Gander has his first ecstatic glimpse of a steam engine, Stead says "although Gander was a boy not touched by the romance of books here was something that stirred him deeply -- the romance of machinery, of steam, which at the pull of a lever turned loose the power of giants!"

(p. 54). The mention of the giants of folk-tale suggests that Gander lives in a mechanical mythology, a new imaginative environment in which the power is not in the land or the elements but in machines under man's exclusive control. He evidently has no further need for the garden vision of a benevolent natural order. What this love affair with machinery does to man's relationship to the natural processes of the land is explored again more explicitly in Grove's Fruits of the Earth. We can see its effects on Gander's instincts for human love in his progress with young Jo Burge. At times the rivalry of girl and steam engine seems a fairly equal one; at the first mention of his opportunity to work as fireman on a threshing outfit, "Gander's heart thumped again, but with an altogether different emotion. If the thought of Jo Burge could make that heart quicken its beat, so too could the prospect of firing a steam engine " (p. 98). But the steam engine wins out, and though it should be clear from a number of incidents that Gander has been emasculated by the machine, Stead's supposed remedy for this condition is to send him into town at the end of the novel to work as a mechanic, as though the urgent necessity were to get him off the land. Gander had never really been on the land; the machine had always been between him and the soil. Stead does not seem to have been aware of this, even when he has Gander's father innocently remark, "you'd think farmin' was an industry, instead of a pursoot" (p. 86). Ironically, an industry is precisely what farming is becoming as Gander grows up.

The effect of mechanization, of farming becoming "an industry instead of a pursoot," is, in classic marxian terms, to further alienate prairie man from the land. This process in turn affects the relations

of the people involved and even their basic humanity. Stead says that the Stake family "hid their sentiments from each other and held it a weakness to show any sign of family affection" (p. 63). Kreisel discusses this type of emotional repression as a universal effect of having to conquer a harsh land,[8] but here the family relationships are further demoralized by mindless concentration upon production, upon farming as industry. In Smoking Flax Stead explains the resultant plight of the farm woman left to do all the domestic work which supports the family, but in Grain he finds a more expressive way, in an image of Mrs. Stake when Gander unexpectedly offers her a little kindness. Gander's impulse springs from the same meeting with the city girl which brought him to see the sunset for the first time. The mother does not know this, and becomes rather waspish about the strange girl when she finds out. Our subsequent loss of sympathy for her only emphasizes the painful vividness of this first impression of the woman and her son:

> In the garden to the west of the house he saw his mother working, her form doubled over in a gingham dress faded drab with age. He felt a sudden surging in his heart toward his mother. He shuffled over to her, down between rows of currant bushes greening with their spring foliage. She did not hear his footsteps in the soft earth; she was bent over, setting out cabbages.
>
> "Couldn't I do that?" he interrupted her. She looked up quickly, her sharp eyes piercing him as though she suspected some kind of treachery. She could not recall that Gander ever before had offered her a service. He was playing a joke on her. But he held his ground steadily.
>
> "I thought you was busy with the car," she parried.
>
> "Through with it. Could help you a little, if you like."
>
> "Why -- why -- Willie?" Her old face began to twist.

It recalled the day he gave her the twenty-dollar bill.

"That's all right, Mother," he said, with strange gentleness. "I'm goin' to give you a hand. I'm goin' to help you, once in a while."

Still with misgivings, she showed him how to set out the tender plants. (p. 150)

The image of the mother is especially poignant, appearing as it does in the spring, in the garden, among the tender growing things. When we reflect upon the garden image of the prairie in Stead's early work, the irony is massive, hard even to grasp. Whether or not Stead was aware of it, he could not have found a better way of exploding the prelapsarian image of the farmer as innocent, ennobled by his contact with nature. Both of his characters here are fallen enough, but especially the farmer. Paradoxically, it is Gander who is not at home with growing things other than cash crops and must be shown how to plant a cabbage. If Stead means the ending of his novel to be hopeful -- and it would seem out of character for him not to -- then he must not have recognized that it was, so to speak, the machine in the garden which caused this fall. For Gander at least, the machine is the visible cause of alienation from the land. Stead in a less doggedly realistic mood might even have recognized the possibilities of the steam engine breathing fire and drawing its sinuous train of cars as a kind of mechanical serpent.

Martha Ostenso could be said to approach the condition of man on the prairie from the opposite direction to Stead. Like Grain, her Wild Geese has been described in such phrases as "uncompromising realism"[9] but its realistic fidelity to circumstantial detail is the least remarkable feature of the style and is in some degree misleading. Take

the initial scene of waiting for Caleb to come home; the suspense is quite plausibly created right down to the sound of Lind Archer's chair: "The Teacher sat quietly in the low red plush rocker, listening to the springs of it exclaim as she rocked to and fro."[10] For two and a half pages the imminence of Caleb is felt in the nervous apprehension of the whole family even more than in the direct references to his bullying ways by the one rebellious daughter, Judith.

> Then the door opened. At first Caleb seemed to be a huge man. As he drew into the centre of the kitchen, Lind could see that he was, if anything, below medium height, but that his tremendous shoulders and massive head, which loomed forward from the rest of his body like a rough projection of rock from the edge of a cliff, gave him a towering appearance. (p. 13)

The detail of the household has been circumstantial, but Caleb, when he appears, is a creature of romance. The period of expectation, while we weigh the implications of the other characters' attitudes toward him, allows Caleb's looming figure to grow without the constraint of any visible, finite description, and when he is finally described, it is in imprecise but superlative adjectives -- "huge," "tremendous," "massive," "towering" -- and with an equally expansive simile, "a rough projection of rock from the edge of a cliff." Caleb is in this way given the larger-than-life dimensions of a romantic villain, and in spite of later apparently realistic detail such as his "weedy, tobacco-stained moustache," he retains that stature through the novel.

Whatever Ostenso's early advocates have said about her realism, the power of Wild Geese resides in this romantic characterization. Ostenso gives us dark romantic symbols acting out the subconscious drama

of man's relationship with the land in contrast to Stead's daylight rendering of the pressures of common circumstance on those committed to the land. Ostenso's characters are richly evocative -- Caleb, Judith with her "great, defiant body," who "stood squarely on her feet, as if prepared to take or give a blow" (p. 11), and minor characters like Fusi Aronson, described as "somehow lonely, as a towering mountain is lonely" (p. 31).

The characters are dark because man's relationship with his environment is distorted, but like Stead, Ostenso does not seem to recognize the basis of the settlers' alienation from the soil. She presents her northern Manitoba people at odds with the land ostensibly because they are enslaved to it and it is a harsh master. The tyranny of Caleb is the tyranny of the land, and Ostenso describes him as "Caleb who could not be characterized in the terms of human virtue or human vice -- a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence" (p. 33). The young people from civilization, Lind Archer and Mark Jordan, can free the victims of his tyranny because they can understand and articulate the condition of the people. Lind, from whose point of view most of the story is told, describes to Mark what is wrong with the Gare household: "'They all have a monstrously exaggerated conception of their duty to the land -- or rather to Caleb, who is nothing but a symbol of the land'" (p. 78). Such a suspiciously authorial comment amounts to a serious lapse in plausibility unless we take Lind to be an intensely bookish young woman who would go around talking about people as symbols. Ostenso intrudes to impose this convenient identification between the tyrant and

the land. Caleb, of course, is literally blackmailing his wife Amelia with the fact that Mark is her unacknowledged illegitimate son, and through her he can reduce the children to almost inhuman subservience. His only opposition is from Judith, who says she hates the land, and talks openly of going to the city.

By this point it should be apparent that a great deal rests on the uses of the term "land." There are inconsistencies in Ostenso's symbols which betray uncertainty or equivocation in her statement of the relationship between man and the land. Judith is to be set in opposition to the "land," yet she is everything earthy and elemental. She is once described as "the embryonic ecstasy of all life" (p. 58). And if the earth itself were a denial of life, then it would never admit of this sort of description: "A softness was unfurling like silk ribbons in the pale air, and the earth was breaking into tiny warm rifts from which stole a new green" (p. 25). And Judith is closely identified with the earth beyond Caleb's farm. Her communion with wild nature alone in the woods is very sensual:

> Not knowing fully what she was doing, Judith took off all her clothing and lay flat on the damp ground with the waxy feeling of new, sunless vegetation under her. . . . . Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and mind hidden here in the woods. The fields Caleb had tilled had no tenderness, she knew. But here was something forbiddenly beautiful, secret as one's own body. (p. 53)

As this passage suggests, Judith also embraces the wild nature within her, allowing her hatred to flare up against Caleb and meeting her lover with a pure animal ferocity. Caleb, on the other hand, is to be identified with the "land", yet he is a man whose every feeling is repressed, who

is said to fear "things out of man's control" (p. 58), and while Judith is fruitful in the natural way, pregnant before she and Sven elope, Caleb is beyond fertility, a sterilizing influence keeping his children on the farm and driving off any suitors.

There are two senses of the term "land" which must be distinguished here. Judith can be identified with the land in the sense in which we have been using the word, land as natural environment. Caleb can be identified with the land only in the sense that "land" is a human construct, property, a means to power. Where Judith represents communion with the land, Caleb represents power over it. His way of doting upon his land is revealing. At night he walks out alone with a lantern to inspect it, as Judith says, "to assure himself that his land was still there" (p. 18). He obviously sees land not as something he lives with, or from, or upon, but as possession, almost as though it were moveable property which someone might steal. His land-hunger evidently includes no love of the soil; he delegates all the detailed farm work to Amelia and the children, and he exhausts his land just as he over-works his family. His compulsion to master the land in an exploitive way is exactly paralleled by his need to master his wife and his very naturally rebellious daughter. Caleb takes what is clearly a perverted sexual pleasure in imposing his will upon Judith, trying to break her spirit, make her yield entirely to him. At the same time, the part of his farm which focuses his desire for land is his flax crop which he regards with a furtive sexual appetite:

> Caleb would stand for long moments outside the fence beside the flax. Then he would turn quickly to see that no one was

> looking. He would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress -- more intimate than any he had ever given to a woman. (p. 119).

Nowhere in prairie fiction is there a more definite identification between the land and woman and the whole unconscious world of impulse and desire.[11] D.G. Jones, in his chapter "The Dictatorship of Mind" in Butterfly on Rock explains that European man has alienated himself from his natural surroundings by his unrelenting efforts to subjugate these unruly elements inside and outside himself.[12] While Jones does not apply his idea to Ostenso, it is this drama of repression and its consequences Martha Ostenso presents so effectively, and could have presented more powerfully had she not apparently misinterpreted her own symbols and intruded misleading commentary about "the strange unity between the nature of man and the earth here in the north" (p. 77). Caleb loses in both struggles, losing control of himself and his woman, and being killed by his land.

Ostenso sets up two other patterns of allusion which support the interpretation of Caleb as oppressor of the land. Amelia stands in a painful opposition between the old, mean, ugly Caleb and the young, refined, and noble Mark Jordan, who must never learn of his illegitimacy. Her love for young Jordan who arrives in the spring is suggestive in itself, as is the opposition of young and old, but when we are told that hateful old Caleb succeeded to Amelia's hand after Mark's father was gored by a bull, we begin to suspect the submerged presence of a cyclical vegetation myth such as that of Venus and Adonis. Three times the older Jordan is mentioned: "The man who had been gored to death by

a bull on his own farm in the distant south had taken Amelia's soul with him" (p. 20), "The son of Amelia and big Del Jordan, who was gored by a bull" (p. 59), "He [Mark] wore his clothes with such an air, sat in the saddle like a soldier . . . . And his father had been gored by a bull . . . after everything . . . ." [ellipses Ostenso's] (p. 87). These are virtually the only references to Amelia's first lover. The suggestion of Caleb as the boar of winter reinforces his role as sterilizing influence, overthrown by the influence of the young Adonis, Mark Jordan.

The second allusion is to the Old Testament Caleb. Gare is the most complete embodiment of that central archetype of prairie fiction, the prairie patriarch. He is an absolute temporal leader of his family, a tyrant, but he also pretends to a divine commission to carry out his purposes, like the patriarchs of old. We know this hypocrisy masks only greed and a lust for power. Caleb will not allow the rest of the family to attend Church, but "Before dinner on Sunday it was the custom for the family to assemble in the sitting-room and hear Caleb recite the sermon that had been delivered at Yellow Post church" (p. 41). Predictably he takes advantage of these occasions to reinforce his own power with the sanction of the word of God. The choice of the names Caleb and Jordan adds interesting overtones to Gare's role as patriarch. When Moses selected men from all the tribes to cross the Jordan and spy out the land of Canaan, Caleb was the one who urged taking possession of the land immediately; "Let us go up at once and possess it for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 14:30). Others fearing the struggle, sought to give the land a bad name, calling it "a land that

eateth up the inhabitants thereof" (Numbers 14:32). Ostenso may not have intended Caleb's death in the muskeg as an instance of the land eating up the inhabitants thereof, but she certainly presents Caleb as one seeking a promised land at all costs.

Wild Geese could be seen as a demonic counterpart to the idyllic image of cultivating a garden within a divinely ordered nature. As such it is a wholesome antidote to some of the earlier romances of pioneering and it grants the true power to some of the dark forces in human and external nature. But Ostenso's effort to turn the figure around and identify the villain with the land, rather than with man's mistaken conceptions of it, is a symptom of the continuing artistic problem of forming an imaginative conception of the land in relation to man. Ostenso shows a splendid intuition weakened by a faulty conscious grasp of her own symbols.

Grove seems to have understood the conditions of man's alienation from the land which Stead and Ostenso sometimes revealed only inadvertently. The dehumanizing effect of operating the farm as an industry, for example, which Stead only imperfectly grasps, Grove's Abe Spalding is made to become gradually aware of as his farm expands. The strong, dark bond between the land and man's inner life, evident but unexplored in Wild Geese, Abe senses more clearly if less movingly in the passage quoted in the early pages of this chapter. In all his prairie novels, from Settlers of the Marsh to Fruits of the Earth, Grove sees that the main drama is not between man and external nature -- though his characters frequently misunderstand it to be -- but within man, between his conscious will and his own nature.

External nature in Grove is only potentially hostile. In his short story "Snow," for example, the sun looks down from an "indifferent sky" on the death of young Redfern, and the characters are ground in the teeth of an indifferent fate. The stricken mother's last remark, "God's will be done," is the final irony upon a world of cold mechanism.[13] Naturalistic assumptions of this sort actually inform very little of Grove's fiction, however, and Grove explicitly repudiates Zola as a pseudo-realist and his naturalism as pseudo-science.[14] In Fruits of the Earth, when Abe discovers that his great brick mansion is beginning to erode away by imperceptible stages, his remark that "the moment a work of man was finished, nature set to work to take it down again" (p. 134) supposes a totally different universe, working by design, actively opposed to man's will -- that is, if man pits his will against nature's, and initally Grove's heroes do. Niels Lindstedt is introduced in a classic posture of defiance to nature in the first few words of Settlers of the Marsh: "On the road leading north from the little prairie town of Minor two men were fighting their way through the gathering dusk."[15] Like many of Grove's sentences, this has at first an opaque quality which is worth penetrating. Somewhat later a snow-storm begins, but at this point in their journey there is nothing specific against which the men are fighting -- just the dusk, the north, the beginning of November, the wilderness.

That is a fair image of the struggle with nature in Grove. Both Niels and Abe Spalding are well suited to the tangible part of this contest, and the fact that both men win material success with comparative ease is a sign that Grove did not want to cloud the issue. It is the

intangibles in nature which league with the inner nature of man to defeat him, and both men neglect the intangibles. The outward struggle with the land can even become an escape from the more perplexing human problems. When Niels, for example, cannot bear to test his dream of marriage by asking Ellen Amundsen, it is said that "a sort of intoxication came over Niels; work developed into an orgy" (p. 67). At this point and elsewhere in the action, the real struggle with himself is neglected, the real dangers of personal disintegration toward which Niels drifts are ignored.

External nature is a fair opponent, and man could presumably prove himself in the stress of his encounter with it. In Grove's world a strong man can win; what matters is how he wins and what the struggle does to him. Very early in Settlers Grove gives us an image to suggest the dangers of this struggle. As Niels and his friend Lars Nelson walk together into the blizzard, "Both would have liked to talk, to tell and to listen to stories of danger, of being lost, of hairbreadth escapes; the influence of the prairie snowstorm made itself felt. But whenever one of them spoke, the wind snatched his word from his lips and threw it aloft" (p. 16). The men are typically isolated in their struggle, for throughout the novel communication in the harsh northern life is sparse, fragmentary, not just unfulfilling but dangerously unilluminating. The more Niels struggles to master his environment, the more isolated he becomes. The same could be said of Abe Spalding. Even Abe's involvement in local politics is only apparent human interchange, ultimately isolating him still further.

What the struggle can do, not only to the communication between

men, but to a pioneer's humanity, is partly illustrated in the contrast between the Amundsen and the Lund households in Settlers. Amundsen's farm is a model of human order carefully asserted; Lund's is haphazard, reflecting both a concern for human comfort and indulgence of human weaknesses. It seems to include the wrack of broken and betrayed dreams, typified by the ornate but worn-out furniture and clothing which inadequately serve the needs of the Lunds. This last especially is repugnant to Grove's fresh, idealistic young hero. "Niels could not help contrasting the shabby, second-hand, defunct gentility of it all, and the squalor in which it was left, with the trim and spotless but bare austerity of Amundsen's house. It struck him how little there was of comfort in that other home: Ellen's home! And yet, how sincere it was in its severe utility as compared with this! Amundsen's house represented a future; this one, the past: Amundsen's growth; this one, decay" (p. 31). Two entirely different approaches to life are made visible. The Lunds' dreams have been betrayed by an easy-going acceptance of the good and the bad in people, including old Lund himself; the struggle with the land seems to be a losing one, and to the young Niels, full of his own fresh visions, it is depressing. Amundsen, on the other hand, is willing to sacrifice anything to the fulfillment of his purpose, including the children he left in Sweden, and his wife who must suffer pregnancies and self-induced abortions to remain productive on the farm. Amundsen is a prairie patriarch a good deal like Caleb Gare, as harsh and demanding, as hypocritically pious, as sterilizing, and like Caleb he is killed by nature, crushed under the ice he must haul for water in winter. His lack of harmony with nature

is also suggested by this shortage of water. On the Amundsen place Niels and Nelson dig for several days without striking water, while on the Lunds' they find abundant water only a few feet below the surface. And ultimately it is the Lunds who manage to endure, yielding to fate yet clinging to their humanity. The novel does span some seventeen years of life on the marsh, and as Niels grows to accept all of himself he also grows to value the Lunds and their acceptance of life.

In the struggle with the land, the way in which the pioneer seeks to impose his will has everything to do with his spiritual or imaginative harmony with the land. Niels's giant strength is a thing of nature itself, and as long as he works in a state of innocence, he appears to enjoy a kind of harmony with nature. Niels works with his own hands, to expunge the memory of his mother's humiliating servitude in the houses of the rich in Sweden. Abe Spalding does not have any such motive, and here a series of distinctions between the two pioneers begins and should not be overlooked. Abe is from a small farm in Ontario which would have allowed him a respectable living, but no scope for ambition. He comes West to find a "clear prospect," meaning not only totally arable land, unencumbered by debt, but unobscured vision and unimpeded progress. "Well, he would conquer this wilderness; he would change it; he would set his own seal upon it! For the moment, one hundred and sixty acres were going to be his, capable of being tilled from line to line!" (p. 22). His will is militant, to "conquer," and imperialist -- the first quarter will suffice only "for the moment." Abe is another prairie patriarch, a little less sinister than Amundsen or Gare, a little less hypocritical, but with the same overweening

ambition. Though Abe, too is a physical giant, his strength can by no means compass his aspirations. He is caught in a chain of logic which will lead him to the worst kind of alienation from the land, mechanization:

> Conquest of that landscape depended on ways and means of speeding up the work . . . . What was the solution? There was only one: power farming as it was called: machinery would do the work of many horses and many men. But Abe liked the response of living flesh and bone to the spoken word and hated the unintelligent repetition of ununderstood activities which machines demanded. Yet sooner or later he must come to that; he would have to run the farm like a factory; that was the modern trend . . . . [sic] (p. 41).

Like a factory. Because of his ambition to conquer the land, Abe inevitably undergoes the depersonalizing effect of mechanization, the alienating effect of industrialization.

It is not surprising that Grove, living as he did at the height of the mechanical age, concentrated on mechanism, both as theme and as imagery in much of his fiction. The imagery is most obviously developed in Master of the Mill where the mill itself becomes an image of cosmic forces. In Settlers, Niels is not directly implicated in mechanization -- he is an earlier pioneer than Spalding and he is also non-Anglo-Saxon, which may have something to do with Grove's way of relating him to machines. At the same time, there is a strain of mechanical imagery running through this first novel of Grove's. At the prospect of having a machine come in to dig his well, Amundsen, for example, discharges Niels and Nelson. And in the end when Niels returns from the penitentiary, his sense of the deterioration of the marsh district is emphasized by the number of automobiles around. The only time Niels is himself identified with machinery is when his inability to recognize his

situation with Clara Vogel is driving him mad. When Niels cannot face the moral dilemma of his marriage, he retreats to the security of his implement shed where he paces among his machinery. As his preference for machinery grows, his relationship with animals deteriorates. In his last winter of bush work when Niels works like a machine it is said "Towards the end of winter Niels' relationship to his horses became completely demoralized " (p. 165). The term seems to have its full literal meaning of having lost a moral basis. He treats his horses without consideration and they respond like slaves -- or machines. And when he is finally overbalanced by the inescapable assertion of his wife's whoredom, when he sets out on the blind path to her murder, his state is described in mechanical terms. "His muscles tightened and remained tight. It was as if a powerful spring inside of him had been tightly wound and then arrested by some catch, either to snap under the strain or to unroll itself in the natural way by setting some complicated wheel-work into irresistible motion, grinding up what might come in its way" (p. 186). True, Niels is also described as a wounded animal seeking its lair, but the mechanical image is remarkable because it is rare and is typically associated with unhealthy states. It further emphasizes the conflict between nature and mechanism which runs through Grove. And like the inexorable logic Abe Spalding is caught up in, it emphasizes the autonomous quality of mechanism, which does not extend the will of man but captures it. Only in a diseased state does the human will ally itself with mechanism against nature.

Grove offers us a more complex and problematic moral universe than either Stead or Ostenso. He says, "We do not, in life, meet with

heroes and villains . . . ."[16] and this tells us a good deal, not only about the mimetic level at which Grove chooses to work, but about the moral shading of character in his novels. At the beginning of Settlers, for example, the incidents could easily have generated heroes and villains. Old Sigurdsen turns Niels and Nelson out into a blizzard at gunpoint. In Wild Geese the same inhuman act -- turning the brothers of Fusi Aronson out in a storm -- is one mark of the blackness of Caleb's villainy, yet Sigurdsen develops into a sympathetic character and the closest friend of Niels. Grove's denial of the black and white morality of hero and villain is especially significant because one of Niels' fatal weaknesses is a need for such moral absolutes. He has come to Canada where he believes life is simplified and he can be brought only slowly and painfully to see that no moral question is ever simple and that no human being can escape being implicated in the sins of humanity.

Grove can create a more complex world than Stead's or Ostenso's because he commands a greater range of technique. The circumstantial realism which Stead developed to good effect, Grove managed with greater precision. The most obvious examples appear in the essays in Over Prairie Trails.[17] At the same time, Grove could explore the shadows of desire and dread which heighten the characters in Wild Geese. Grove called himself a "realist," but the term broadens as he discusses it. While he holds that realism is "a matter of literary procedure, not choice of subject," he rejects Zola's naturalism as psuedo-science. In his essay "Realism in Literature," Grove says "Shakespeare was a realist; but his realism has very little to do with

accuracy in such externals as the historic or social costume. Art is not a matter of facts and figures. 'The aim' said Lowell, 'of the artist is psychologic, not historic truth.'"[18] And in pursuit of that "psychologic" truth Grove sometimes enters those areas of radically subjective experience usually considered the province of romancers. The whole symbolic structure of Settlers, for that matter, with its light and dark females, its questing, death and rebirth patterns, could profitably be explored in romantic terms.

For particular techniques, Grove's creation of two crucial scenes in the novel is worth examining. The first is when Niels innocently comes to ask for Ellen's hand. The scene is her garden, which for Niels has become an idyllic spot; the time is just before a summer storm, and throughout the scene, which is unusually sensuous, vivid, and lyric for Grove, nature seems to respond to the rising emotions of the two who both know what is to come. Even Niels somehow senses the tragic issue of his errand, but suspense is built up. A little later in the scene, after the passage quoted here, the narration shifts to an immediate, breathless present tense:

> As they crossed the yard, imponderable things, incomprehensible waves of feeling passed to and fro between them:; things too delicate for words; things somehow full of pain and anxious, disquieting anticipation: like silent discharges between summer clouds that distantly blink at each other in lightning.
>
> The air, too, was charged; its sultriness foreboded a storm. Yet, there was not a cloud in the upper reaches of the atmosphere; only at the horizon there lay, in the far north-west, a white bank which, above the dark cliff of forest, showed a rounded, convoluted outline, its edge blushing with a golden iridescence.

> The slightest breeze ambled into the clearing from the east, scarcely perceptible, yet refreshing where it could be felt.
>
> Between the two, as the silence lengthened -- between man and woman, boy and girl -- the consciousness arose that the other knew of the decision which was at hand: it was almost oppressive. Some step was to be taken, had to be taken at last: it was a tragic necessity no longer to be evaded . . . . (p. 94)

The nature imagery is all pathetically attuned to the people; the emotions run to subjective absolutes, "imponderables", "incomprehensibles" (ultimately inexpressibles); the two figures are generalized as "boy and girl" so that the present tense, when adopted, creates a timeless archetypal drama of youth. In the corresponding later scene of their meeting, after Niels' marriage, Clara's murder, Niels' prison term, a similar idyll is enacted in subdued tones, with tempered judgments, shades of feeling, so that the romantic urgency of the first flush of their love is replaced by the sober tones of a circumspect maturity.

With the range of his style -- not all of which fits comfortably under the term "realism" -- Grove generates a full experience of man's engagement with external nature and its relation to his own internal nature. In Settlers particularly he may have found one of the rare combinations of techniques which capture at once the insistence of brute circumstances on the plains and the dreams of the pioneers. And since the search for a literary form is part of the novelist's struggle for imaginative survival, the example of Grove's fiction is doubly valuable, both for his treatment of the theme and for his development of the techniques. To say that Grove has taken man's alienation from the land as a major theme would be misleading. His vision of man's

relationship with the land is far more complex and ambiguous, but it is consistently a denial of the earlier fictional view of man in the garden, the romance of pioneering. Grove recognizes that man's will to assert himself over the land is not simply a corruptible impulse, as Stead had seen it, but in itself an arrogant if not blasphemous denial of nature.

Despite the cataclysmic events of the 1930's the fiction about that decade is as much a completion of the moral questioning begun by earlier realists as it is a reaction to the terrible years of depression and drought. One of Mrs. Bentley's early conceptions of her place on the prairie sounds very like the fulfillment of Grove's prophecy that "such a vessel may be engulfed by such a sea." Mrs. Bentley says, "There's a high, rocking wind that rattles the windows and creaks the walls. It's strong and steady like a great tide after the winter pouring north again, and I have a queer, helpless sense of being lost miles out in the middle of it, flattened against a little peak of rock."[19] Whatever protection that ill-conceived vessel of human order afforded has been lost, the vessel sunk and the survivors left clinging to the small, treacherous island of the prairie town. Mrs. Bentley suggests more than the depression lot of personal poverty and despair; there is a threat of utter annihilation, darkness, and unmeaning. This is a good existentialist image too, and that may be part of the growing appeal of <u>As For Me and My House</u>. The drought and depression of the prairie can provide a type of man's ultimate isolation and loneliness.

If the fiction of the 1930's brings full circle the movement from the garden myth to nature as inimical to man, it also introduces

new elements. Drought and dust storms produce inevitable imagery of the desert as distinct from the earlier wilderness. Where a wilderness is chaotic and threatening, a desert is barren and suggests a spiritual emptiness which is not a feature of the earlier fiction, however grim it might become. The overtones of a waste land barren through the sins of the people haunt some of Ross's stories, and there does seem to be a need for some kind of sacrifice. The victims are more weak than wicked: Judith West in As For Me and My House, Ellen in "The Lamp at Noon," Eleanor in "Not By Rain Alone." The same could be said of sacrificial victims in McCourt's novels: Neil Fraser in Music at the Close, Norah in Home is the Stranger, Dermot in Walk Through the Valley. Possibly the bitterness of the 1930's brought out the need for human sacrifice. Man clearly has had a responsibility for his disharmony with nature; the world which had been disordered in Grove's fiction is now beyond remedy. It demands ritual atonement.

There is also a growing recognition that the shapes of man's own culture isolate him from the land and contribute to this spiritual emptiness. The farmers at Partridge Hill are the hardest hit people in Ross's novel, yet they are grimly, doggedly continuing in the hope that the land will come back. Philip's portrait of Lawson testifies to the strength of the farmer's endurance. The townspeople are the most forlorn people in the desert, and those lost between, people like Philip and Paul who have been isolated from the land by a little education, now belong nowhere. It is a final, full recognition that man's culture has kept him from placing himself imaginatively in the land.

Neil Fraser in McCourt's Music at the Close is another forlorn

figure, the nominal owner of farm land, but enamoured of the life of the mind and incapable of developing any relationship whatever with the land. He would rather speculate on grain futures, or rent out the farm and travel, or neglect it and dream of moving to the "promised land" of the Peace River Country. What Neil imagines (and perhaps McCourt did too) is that some bond or harmony with the land had once existed but had been lost. Of his Uncle Matt, Neil says "he had loved the land with an inarticulate, single-minded intensity."[20] Given the story from Neil's point of view, we have little evidence of any such love; Neil's belief in it is significant mainly in confirming its absence in himself. Being such a creature of illusions, Neil easily gives in to disillusionment and bitterness toward the land, but his wife Moira brings him back to reality: "It's not that the land is sour, Neil, and you know it. It's just that it's neglected, only half-cultivated. It's our own fault that we're in a mess, not nature's" (p. 185). Neil's farm is a physical example of the desert -- both physical and psychic -- which can be created by man's failure to adapt culturally to the plains.

To revert to Grove's sea metaphor, we appear to be getting fiction in which the vessel, the pioneer farm has been engulfed by the prairie sea, and in its place man clings to culture or the town, which is seen as an island, but as Mrs. Bentley says, "a rocky, treacherous island." Throughout As For Me and My House it is evident that the town does more to constrict than to support or protect the people. It is a false refuge. In this respect the failure of the town exposes the pioneer faith in an encompassing intangible order which was the basis of the fiction before the 1920's. The cultural order is life-denying

because it is false, like the pettiness and bigotry of the town, reflected in the false fronts of the stores, and false because it is unnatural on the prairie. Even the most amiable member of Horizon's social circle, Mrs. Bird, describes herself as an "expatriate" from England, though she has never been there (p. 21). Mrs. Bentley describes one of Philip's sketches which catches the town's quality of incongruity.

> Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle.
>
> But the town in contrast has an upstart, mean complacency. The false fronts haven't seen the prairie. Instead they stare at each other across the street as into mirrors of themselves, absorbed in their own reflections.
>
> The town shouldn't be there. It stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves. (p. 69)

A failure of the imagination is obviously a major factor in this disharmony between man and his surroundings.

Yet however petty and despicable the town, Mrs. Bentley concedes that she needs it as protection against the emptiness of the desert. Mrs. Bentley provides the first direct, conscious recognition by a fictional character of the struggle for imaginative survival.

> We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it first the night I walked alone along the river bank -- a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of existence so smug, compact, that here we feel abashed

> somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude -- we think a force or presence into it -- even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us -- for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all. (pp. 99-100)

This is also the first recognition in prairie fiction that man creates the hostility he confronts. It adds an entirely new dimension to the view of man's alienation from the land. It is the condition Frye has described as the "Garrison mentality," in which the people, feeling their culture threatened by the vast indifference of the wilderness, huddle together, stiffening their meagre cultural defences and projecting all their hostilities on their surroundings. The effect, as we can see in As For Me is to isolate people not only from the surrounding hostile nature, but from each other and in great measure from their own elemental natures. It is, as Frye and D.G. Jones point out, a condition common in Canadian literature, but it is especially appropriate to the prairie at this point where man's failure to establish imaginative harmony with the prairie has been aggravated by a failure of his apparently successful physical adaptation to the plains.

Footnotes

[1]"The 1920s," in The Canadians 1867 - 1967, ed. J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), p. 210.

[2]Peace River Country (New York: Doubleday, 1958).

[3]The High Plains (Toronto: Macmillan, 1938).

[4]There are some novels, of course, which do not belong in any prairie tradition, like Flos Williams' Fold Home (Toronto: Ryerson, 1950) or Lovat Dickson's Out of the West Land (London: Collins, 1944), which are essentially novels of English country-house life. They work with a few popular generalizations about the West, and they may show occasional sensitivity to their Alberta settings, but the focus of attention is so confined to a social world that the prairie need not be there. Bertram Brooker's Think of the Earth (Toronto: Nelson, 1936), which won a Governor General's Award, belongs in a similar category. The intellectual torments of Brooker's Tavistock seem to have nothing to do with the Manitoba town he is visiting.

[5]Fruits of the Earth (1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 138.

[6]Norah Story's criticism of "Stead's romantic attitudes and his use of the stock villain and somewhat naive hero."has very little application to The Smoking Flax or Grain. The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto: Oxford, 1967), p. 776.

[7]Grain (1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 15.

[8]"The Prairie: A State of Mind," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University Press, 1971), p. 264.

[9]Carlyle King, Introduction to Wild Geese (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961).

[10]Wild Geese, p. 11.

[11]There is one reference perhaps equally explicit in Fruits of the Earth, p. 24, where Abe Spalding slants the point of his plough into the virgin prairie.

[12]Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 57.

[12]The dark powers of nature seem to emerge more readily in novels set, not on the prairie, but just beyond, in the northern bush country. I am thinking not only of Wild Geese and Yoke of Life, but of Christine Van der Mark's In Due Season (Toronto: Oxford, 1947) set in the Peace River Country, Gladys Tall Taylor's Pine Roots (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956) set in northern Manitoba and Sheila Mackay Russell's The Living Earth (Toronto: Longman's, 1954), set in northern Alberta.

[13]"Snow," in Robert Weaver, ed., Canadian Short Stories (Toronto: Oxford, 1967), p. 63.

[14]"Realism in Literature," in his It Needs to Be Said (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. 58.

[15]Settlers of the Marsh (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 15.

[16]It Needs, p. 73.

[17]Two of Grove's works which have a bearing on his prairie fiction but cannot be discussed at length are Over Prairie Trails 1922; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960, and Master of the Mill 1944; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961.

[18]It Needs, pp. 70-71.

[19]As For Me and My House (1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. 35.

[20]Music at the Close (1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 132.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF THE IMAGINATION

> "We have not yet crystallized our attitude to life into architectonic symbols; perhaps we never shall."
>
> - Frederick Philip Grove[1]

The spiritual alienation from the land we have been examining in fiction from the 1920's to the 1950's is a general acknowledgment of the pioneers' failure to create the needed imaginative order while subduing the land physically. In this fiction there also emerges a specific awareness of a struggle between imagination and prairie. Some of the imagery in particular suggests an essential hostility between the two: the prairie remains intractable, the imagination stifled, not the transforming power it should be. Perhaps this condition could have been predicted from the time of Butler and Grant's early observations upon the elusive power of the landscape. Its eventual effect can be a static tension between imagination and brute externals of the sort created in As For Me and My House. And as we can see from Ross's very accomplished novel, the writers themselves are winning their struggles of the imagination. They recognize the beleaguered condition of the prairie imagination and its efforts to "house" itself, to surround itself with meaningful order in the midst of an alien life, and they are increasingly finding the images to embody that condition, creating the imaginative order they find wanting

in the life around them.

Not surprisingly, the house becomes one of the most prominent symbols, representing man's first cultural and imaginative assertion as well as his most immediate defence against his environment.[2] It can be seen as the first communication between man and land. Even in its most rudimentary form, the house works as one of Grove's "architectonic symbols" to express an attitude toward life. Grove evinces some doubt that we will ever successfully achieve this kind of expression, and the number of unfinished, ruinous or incongruous houses does suggest a failure of the collective imagination.

The house, as a central expression of the imagination is often one embodiment of a larger dream, and therefore closely related to the recurrent figures of dreamers, visionaries, sensitive children, and artists who are the usually unhappy champions of the imagination in prairie fiction. While they have general similarities, these figures are individually as varied in their suggestiveness as, say, Abe Spalding and the sensitive boy in Ross's "Cornet at Night." Unlike the figures of the land, whose element is, or ought to be, the earth, the characters most given over to imagination are often associated with water, like Mrs. Bentley, who walks in the rain, or Stead's Calvin Beach, who writes by the lakeshore, or in a more sinister way, Grove's Len Sterner, with his fatal attraction to Lake Manitoba. Associations between imagination, water and all the fluid, unconscious depths of the psyche are, of course, universal but may have special implications in this body of fiction. Association with an element so scarce could be taken as a melancholy comment upon the

position of the imagination on the prairie. In the minds of the realists at least, the prairie sea is dry, solid, sunlit. It may be significant that Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind is the only major work to associate imagination less with water than with air. Young Brian is inspired by the fluid which naturally washes the shores of the prairie sea -- the wind. Mitchell's is also the only major novel to work out a reconciliation between prairie and the imagination.

The house is the most definite of these images of the struggle between imagination and prairie. Each of the novels which mark the beginning of prairie realism, Grain, Settlers of the Marsh, and Wild Geese, contains a similar house, one that is identified with human ideals in some way, but becomes a mocking reminder of the neglect, failure or defeat of those ideals. In Grain the promised house which is to dignify Mrs. Stake's service on the farm is delayed so long that it comes to represent betrayal more than concern for human values. In the East, Jackson Stake had promised his bride "a frame house with lath and plastered walls and an upstairs," but it is said that "Gander was driving a four-horse team before the ribs of his father's frame house rose stark against the prairie sky."[3] By this time the family is beginning to disperse, and they do not, in any case, know how to inhabit the more pretentious house. The priorities of humane and materialistic values are emphasized when Jackson cannot use the old house for a granary: "It is one thing to live in a house with rotten sills, but quite another to risk the year's harvest in it" (p. 85). The atmosphere of the Stake household is almost complete anathema to the imagination. What happens to young Gander is essentially

what happens to the spirited colt he breaks to the plow: "discipline soon ground the imagination out of his soul as it does to other beasts of burden besides horses, and already he accepted straining on his traces as a distasteful but inevitable procedure" (p. 118).

In Wild Geese the new house is a minor recurring motif, the preoccupation of the plodding eldest son, who is described as a "stumbling dreamer, forever silent in his dream."[4] His dream of a house is the only sign we have of stifled potential in Martin. He is a builder at heart, and his conception is grander than Jackson Stake's: "The dream grew to a desire that crept into his hands. His hands grasped the good, enduring lumber, the plaster, the fine laths, the shingles, the panes of glass, the stones for the foundation and the chimney of the New House. . . . There would be a veranda facing the main road such as he had seen on the houses pictured in the mail order catalogue" (p. 92). It is a measure of Caleb's villainy that he will not think of building anything but a barn, and it is another sacrifice to monetary values. In both of these novels, as in many others, the imagination could hardly be said to contend directly with the prairie. It is sacrificed to something in the people themselves, their will, their avarice, their need to subdue the prairie.

Houses in Grove's novels play a larger part. In Settlers of the Marsh, when Niels brings Clara home as his wife, she refers to his house as "the famous White Range Line House." Its fame has spread partly because the house is remarkable in itself. The most imposing in the district, with a kitchen and four rooms fifteen by eighteen feet, Niels' house is part of a grand vision, meant to embody visibly

his dream of plenty and domestic comfort. When Ellen will not marry him and complete the dream, the house becomes a hollow mockery, and when the horror of his marriage to Clara grows upon him, the house becomes a demonic parody of his dream. It is totally inhabited by the deathly life of the woman he identifies with sin, and Niels avoids it as much as possible, sitting and staring at it from the security of his implement shed: "He entered his house only when it could not be helped. . . . But he stared across at it, with unseeing eyes, at that big house which he had built for himself four, five years ago. . . For himself? No, of that he must not think. . . . That way lay insanity"[5] [ellipses Grove's]. The woman is a caricature of the wife Niels had hoped for. The house, like his dream, has been profaned; Niels cannot tolerate the fallen woman in his house any more than he can admit human imperfection to his dream.

Grove's other novels make further use of houses. In Our Daily Bread, the term acquires its extended meaning of family or dynasty as John Elliott nurses his patriarchal dream of gathering his children about him. His cultural assertion belongs to the familiar category of imposing blindly upon the plains a social order bought from another tradition. It does not fit, and as Mrs. Jackel points out, Grove uses the decay of the actual house as an image of the decay of the old man and his dream.[6] The grand house in Fruits of the Earth is more celebrated because Grove himself has drawn attention to it. In an author's note to the book, and again in In Search of Myself, he describes an almost derelict farm from which sprang one of the germinal ideas for the novel:

> This farm was such as to suggest a race of giants who had founded it; but on inquiry I found that it was held by tenants who tilled a bare ten per cent of its acreage. In a barn built for half a hundred horses they kept a team of two sorry nags; and they inhabited no more than two or three rooms of the outwardly palatial house.[7]

The house again speaks of dynastic or patriarchal ambition, but specially in this picture of its decline it shows the vanity of human presumption which haunts Grove's entire novel. Abe's house is in some sense a blasphemous assertion, not just against nature but against God -- a Tower of Babel. And like the houses in Grain and Wild Geese it is delayed so long that it comes to represent the neglect of human values for the sake of ambition. For Ruth, who has wanted "comfort, not splendour," it is too late. Like the Stakes, the Spaldings are ill at ease with luxury: "They sat in the dining room; both had sat too long on straight-backed chairs to feel at ease in an arm-chair" (p. 150).

In Ross's As For Me and My House, the house is more than ever a cultural expression, not of a doubtful dream but of a certain nightmare. "The house huddles me," Mrs. Bentley says, "the walls disapprove."[8] And the house does seem capable of both sentience and will. It is the culmination of a strain of house imagery in a number of ways: first in acquiring a life of its own; remarkably strong for all the shabby meanness of the place; second, in being an accomplished cultural assertion -- not of the Bentleys, who are only transients, but of the prairie culture and especially the small town with all its hostility to its natural surroundings. It has been said earlier that the settler's thoroughness in making a formal rectangular world from the "elegant undress" of the prairies was to have unfortunate physical, social,

and psychic consequences. The "House of Bentley," both literally and figuratively, is one of the diminishing squares produced by the geometry of the culture. In a similar and related way, the settlers' implicit faith in an unseen, intangible order, evinced in the earlier fiction as a garden myth, descends ultimately to the sort of repressive, life-denying order which this house represents to the Bentleys. On a rare occasion when Mrs. Bentley buys some steaks to celebrate receiving some of Philip's back pay, she feels in the house itself the disapproval of all the little towns they have served in, all dominated by their Mrs. Finleys and their gods of propriety:

> . . . there was a curiously unsympathetic stillness through the house. I wanted to celebrate, and the walls disapproved. They seemed to be concentrating on me, trying with all their will power to restrain me to propriety and decorum. Every few minutes the windows gave a little rattle of deprecation. Even the smell, the faint old exhalation of the past — it seemed sharper, more insistent, seemed trying to tell me that this is a house of silence and repression and restraint, that it is stronger than we will ever be, that its past will not be mocked. (p. 58)

In his discussion of architectonic symbols, Grove offers the example of Roman architecture as imaginative assertion of a relationship to the world: "The Roman palace expresses the feelings of the householder of its time; it expresses the human reaction of its builder to his surroundings: constant fear and constant watchfulness" (p. 95). It is interesting that this example should occur to Grove in a discussion of the West. Although visually the parsonage in Horizon is undistinguished, to Mrs. Bentley it expresses emphatically the view of the Roman householder. Yet like the cultural order it expresses, the

garrison mentality as it has been called, the house does not protect. It leaks rain, it leaks dust and drafts, it stands too near the sidewalk and all the unsympathetic ears of the town. It keeps nothing out but it holds the Bentleys in, like live bait in a trap.

At the same time that the house is a microcosm of the town and the threatening world outside, it is a mirror of the Bentleys' own stifling personal condition. The "House of Bentley" is a rather uncertain structure. In the passage quoted above it is apparent that Mrs. Bentley projects her own fears upon the stillness of the house. Like the "force or presence" she thinks into nature, the repressiveness of the house is further evidence that we create our own fetters, both collectively and individually.

Houses, of course, are everywhere in the slighter fiction of the period. In Barbara Cormack's The House, for example, the threads of several lives are passed through one small house on the prairie; in Vera Lysenko's Westerly Wild, Marcus Haugan's house, at once sinister and inviting, becomes a sort of prairie Wuthering Heights. These and the minor uses of houses in the work of better writers need only be acknowledged as examples of what we are examining. They attest to, without contributing to, the development of a core of essential images of prairie life which can in turn be seen as elements of the prairie writer's house of fiction. It would seem to be from Ross's use of the house as complex social and personal image that later house imagery descends. There are the great brick houses of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka, for example, with their ponderous imported traditions. In Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man, the madhouse from which Demeter writes may owe something to the senseless

constrictions and incongruities of the Bentley house. The fact that it is a madhouse may also say something about the Bentley's kind of garrison culture as a vantage point from which to view the prairie experience. The house, the imagination, and the artist are all closely related in both Ross and Kroetsch.

The house is usually related directly to the protagonists of the imagination, the visionaries, dreamers and artists. In Grove's novels, as we have seen, the pioneer's vision is expressed in the house. Grove's pioneers, of course, are a distinctive group. The "race" for which he claims to be a spokesman includes only those who "feel the impulse of starting anew," those for whom "order must arise out of chaos; the wilderness must be tamed."[9] They should be distinguished from the ordinary pioneer who came West mainly for economic advantage. Grove describes men of unusual spirit, imagination and vision, and their impulse to start anew and make order arise out of chaos is both their strength and their weakness. As we have seen in Chapter Four, Abe Spalding's vision of Spalding Hall dominating the prairie, John Elliott's patriarchal vision of generations growing up around him, Niels Lindstedt's vision of domestic purity -- all tend to blind the visionaries to what is happening around them. Had they not been so blinded they might have had a better grasp of the realities of their lives, but they would have been smaller, less significant men. To Grove they embody the central dilemma of the pioneer condition.

Niels Lindstedt is the most subtle and complex of these visionaries, and an understanding of the action of Settlers of the Marsh depends upon a recognition of the sequence of his visions. They first appear at the

very beginning of the novel when Niels and Nelson are battling a snow-storm: "A vision of some small room, hot with the glow and flicker of an open fire, took possession of Niels" (p. 17). This is a prototype upon which Niels' later visions are built. He has come to Canada because he wants to begin anew, to expunge the memory of his mother's humiliating servitude in Sweden. Here he believes that life is simplified, and his simple dream of success and domestic happiness can be fulfilled. This is the usual form of Niels' vision:

> . . . a vision took hold of Niels: of himself and a woman, sitting of a mid-winter night by the light of a lamp and in front of a fire, with the pitter-patter of children's feet sounding down from above: the eternal vision that has moved the world and that was to direct his fate. (p. 36)

The elements of warmth, security, love and generation are for Niels clothed in innocence and purity and watched over by his mother. They are threatened, it appears, by the allure of Clara Vogel who brings out low and disgraceful impulses in him. It is said that when Niels is with Mrs. Vogel "his chastity felt attacked" (p. 52). The virginal Ellen Amundsen is the woman Niels expects to complete his dream, but her feminine qualifications are mainly negative. She is demure, chaste, even cold. The vision itself is essentially a denial of Niels' own creatural impulses and in effect, of all warm, living, imperfect humanity. No real woman belongs in it, as Niels at one point realizes: "True, he had seen in his visions a wife and children; but the wife had been a symbol merely. Now that he was in the country of his dreams and gaining a foothold, it seemed as if individual women were bent on replacing the vague, schematic figures he had had in his mind. He found this intrusion strangely

disquieting" (p. 40). The inhuman abstraction of Niels' vision is in one way merely childish, but later it has serious consequences. It implies an intolerance of human imperfection, a naive black and white morality, which lead Niels both to marry and to murder Clara Vogel.

There is a version of the dream which includes Clara as the partner, but the tone is changed, as well as some features of the scene; there is no pitter-patter of children's feet, and the two do not sit on either side of the fire. "He was crouching on a low stool in front of the woman's seat; and he was leaning his head on her" (p. 56). There are suggestions, though Grove does not elaborate on them, of sorrow, but also of greater physical intimacy, and of submission to an almost maternal care. The faint suggestion of Niels' mother is curious, since Clara looks to him "like sin" while his mother appears to him as a vision of reproving purity, but Grove seems to have juxtaposed the two deliberately. They are not as far apart as Niels imagines when he turns for support from Clara's tempting to the vision of his mother:

> He longed to be with his mother, to feel her gnarled, calloused fingers rumpling his hair, and to hear her crooning voice droning some old tune. . . .
>
> And then he seemed to see her before him: a wrinkled, shrunk little face looking anxiously into his own.
>
> He groaned.
>
> That face with the watery, sky-blue eyes did not look for that which tormented him: what tormented him, he suddenly knew, had tormented her also; she had fought it down. Her eyes looked into himself, knowingly, reproachfully. (p. 55) [Grove's ellipses]

Niels, of course, does not suddenly know any such thing. What he sees in his mother's eyes is his own self-reproach at being sexually stirred by Clara. While he has begun to grant his mother enough humanity to feel his temptations, he does not at this stage understand the look on his mother's face. He will first have to accept his own humanity, and in particular his own sexuality.

If the novel had ended, as some would like it to end, at the murder of Clara, then Niels' character would have been left in this state. The novel would have been about a rather unusual little tragedy of innocence rather than about the always tragic necessity of being disillusioned, of falling from innocence. Having it confirmed that he has married a whore and then killing her teaches Niels nothing essential about humanity, but the total experience, including the need to return and take up life again, does lead him to a qualified acceptance of man in his fallen state, as we can see from two strangely related incidents in the novel.

The first, quite early in the novel is during the illness of Old Sigurdsen, who has become something of a father to Niels. The old man rambles in his sleep, and fragments of his past drift to the surface:

> "Tya . . . . Yo, she laugh. . . and she turn her hips.
> And her breasts. . . . Hi . . . tya. and she bite!
> Sharp teeth she had, the hussy. . . ." [sic]
>
> And this decay of the human faculties, the reappearance of the animal in a man whom he loved, aroused in Niels strange enthusiasms: as if he could have got up and howled and whistled, vying with the wind. (p. 84)

Niels is repelled by the animal in Sigurdsen as he is by the animal in himself, yet his instincts respond sympathetically. Nothing could seem further from his visions of his mother than the senile sexuality which survives in Sigurdsen's delirium, yet the memory of this scene eventually merges with a vision of his mother. It can only happen much later, after Niels' tragic marriage and prison term.

> The vision he saw was that of the homely face of his mother. Yet, her features were strangely blurred; as if, superimposed on them, there appeared those of another; and at last he recognized these as the features of the old man, of Sigurdsen, his neighbour whom he had loved.
>
> Long, long ago, in another such vision, his mother had looked at him reproachfully, seriously, warningly.
>
> And the old man, in the wanderings of his decaying mind, had betrayed to him some corner of his subliminal memories. . . .
>
> These two, in vision and memory, seemed to blend, to melt together. Both looked at him, in this new vision, out of one face in which, now his, now her lines gained the ascendency. . . .
>
> The wistful face of his mother relaxed in a knowing smile: yes, such was she who had borne him . . . .
>
> The old man's face took her place: he was moving his lips and muttered, "H'm . . . tya." [Grove's ellipses] (p. 210)

Sigurdsen suggests both sexuality and creatural decay, the two things Niels could not accept, in others or himself, and here they are incorporated into Niels' guiding vision. The mother's face relaxing into a "knowing smile" is on the one hand a sad falling away from the ideal of purity it has been to Niels, but on the other hand it is a measure of Niels' acceptance of himself and life. This composite

vision is the clearest evidence we have that Niels has been matured and not simply subdued by his experience of seventeen years. Critics such as Saunders would not interpret the last part of the novel as an unnecessary "happy ending" if they had attended carefully to the sequence of Niels' visions. The ending, in fact, encompasses a much larger tragedy than the murder of Clara -- the inevitable fall from innocence.[10]

Niels' life is central to Grove's treatment not only of the immigrant imagination but of the pioneer imagination generally. Niels is misled, in a sense, by the "virgin" land into believing he can begin anew and impose order upon chaos in a way he cannot do. Thus the imagination is drawn out, pursuing a freedom which does not exist. When Niels thinks of moving further back into the bush, Grove applies to him almost the same words he uses later in In Search of Myself to describe his "race" of pioneers:

> He looked upon himself as belonging to a special race — a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations. . .
>
> But, of course, it was only the dream of the slave who dreams of freedom . . . . [Grove's ellipses] (p. 119)

Grove's visionaries are inevitably tragic.[11] If they lose their struggle with nature, like Kolm in The Yoke of Life, they are destroyed; if they win, like Abe, they become obsolete as pioneers and therefore meaningless. And as idealists they are virtually committed to failure. As Grove says, "it is one of the fundamental tenets of my creed that an ideal realized is an ideal destroyed."[12] The imagination, committing

Grove's pioneers to dreams and visions in this way, is as much a destructive as a creative force. Taken a step further, it becomes the morbid sensitivity and self-destructive power of young Len Sterner in The Yoke of Life.

While Grove's visionaries are a race apart, it is difficult to separate many of the dreamers, artists and sensitive children in prairie fiction. Often they coincide as they do in McCourt's Neil Fraser, who does not progress from one to the other but remains all three until his death. There are, however, some distinctive features of the relationship each type of character develops with the prairie. The sensitive child is depicted as an alien in an environment specifically hostile to his sensitivity.[13] Consider Grove's Len Sterner, David Torey in Arthur Storey's Prairie Harvest, Eric Barnes in Eggleston's The High Plains, Lilli Landash in Vera Lysenko's Yellow Boots, Charlie in Grove's Fruits of the Earth, and others too numerous to mention. The child is culturally deprived, usually unable to get even rudimentary schooling without great difficulty, and a stranger to literature, art, and good conversation. Or, worse still, he may be driven to empty observance of the forms of an incomprehensible culture, like young Tom's piano lessons in Ross' "Cornet at Night." Without help at home, the child often has an ally, a teacher or some other bearer of culture who represents the unimagined possibility of escape from the cultural desert, who provides the child with ideals and sets him in pursuit of them. Lilli has the Scottish teacher who helps her to escape from virtual slavery, Eric has the disreputable old geologist who stirs his imagination and eventually provides the money for his escape, and

Charlie Spalding is a favourite of old Mr. Blaine, the school teacher. The child's mentor can, at the same time, breed illusion, as the romantic ne'er-do-well Charlie Steele does for Neil Fraser, or by awakening in the child an intellectual life, set him in tragic pursuit of impossible goals, as Mr. Crawford does for Len Sterner. The culture bearer does commonly bear an alien culture into the prairie world, and is therefore a disruptive force, for good or ill, but the disruption is usually seen as salutary for the child because the prairie way of life threatens to stifle the young imagination. Ross's "Cornet at Night" isolates the child's anguish briefly and poignantly. There the child's artistic imagination is identified with the beautiful but forlorn note of the cornet played in the immense prairie night by the impractical young man who is so hopelessly out of place in the life of the farm. Our pity is not for the young man, who has chosen, but for Tom, who cannot choose.

Dreamers in prairie fiction are commonly tried by the hard realities of prairie life and found wanting. All the less successful men of imagination in the fiction -- Philip Bentley, Len Sterner, Neil Fraser -- have the taint of the ineffectual dreamer about them, but McCourt provides the most extensive study of dreamers. As R.G. Baldwin says in his article on McCourt, the main question in the novels is "the place of dreams and the imagination and romantic aspiration in the world of reality," and to McCourt the prairie represents the most uncompromising reality. His primary concern is with "sensitive people who are experiencing the ordeal of coming to terms with the land or being crushed by it."[14] Michael Troy in Walk Through the Valley

is probably the only one of McCourt's romantics who successfully comes to terms with the land. Walter Ackroyd in Fasting Friar does not really have to, though for him, as for Neil Fraser and for Norah Armstrong in Home is the Stranger, the landscape carries that age-old threat to the imagination sensed by Butler in 1870. For Ackroyd his prairie university seems to stand "in fortress-like isolation, beleaguered by sinister powers of which the prairie was the visible expression."[15]

When Neil Fraser comes from Ontario as a boy, the prairie depresses and frightens him. When his imagination is kindled by romantic books given to him by the alcoholic remittance man, Charlie Steele, it blossoms in romantic fantasies totally inappropriate to his surroundings. He tries to impose these fantasies upon the prosaic people around him, like Charlie and his friend's sister Helen: "When Guenevere and Launcelot rode together they looked for all the world like Helen Martell and Charlie Steele."[16] Neil's imagination is obviously not transforming his surroundings but escaping from them, and instead of abandoning his fantasies as he grows up, Neil creates a continual succession of them. Each stage of his life is robbed of any chance of success by the fantasies it occasions: his infatuation with Moira Glenn, his trip to the university to become a scholar poet, even his return to the farm. "Neil returned to the farm with grandiose schemes half-formed in his mind. The price of wheat was high; all signs pointed to its going still higher. Neil was now in full control of the farm, and half of the proceeds were to be his. With any kind of luck he could clean up in a very short time" (p. 135). The not unexpected result is that Neil loses everything in

speculations on the grain market.

When Neil finds Moira again after Gil Reardon's death, she makes a choric comment upon his life: "Neil, why don't you try living in the real world for a while? It's more honest — and more heroic" (p. 168). And Neil does try. He returns to the farm in mean, almost desperate circumstances, and he even declares his determination by burning his attempts at writing. But for Neil love is not enough; the temptations of the imagination are too great. When the drought dries up the prairie, he dreams of a Promised Land in the Peace River Country.

> His imagination had leapt over three hundred miles of prairie and parkland to the cool banks of the smooth-flowing Peace, so unlike the turbulent, yellow Saskatchewan, where his acres stretched through miles of woodland and pasture and wheat field, and where his green and white colonial house, standing on a rising point of ground, commanded a magnificent sweep of water stretching into remote, purple distances. (p. 183)

A house is again a prominent part of the dream. When Neil goes to war at the end of the novel, it is with the appearance of escaping rather than facing the challenges of life. And as he lies dying, he sees his death very clearly as a solution to the problem of his living on to disappoint Moira, his son, himself. His reflection that "His death was the only justification for his having lived at all" (p. 217) has the same mawkish quality found in his earliest fantasies. Neil is still the little boy dying heroically to save Helen Martell from stampeding cattle and savouring the pathos of his own funeral.

Neil would presumably have been a dreamer in any environment -- we have no evidence that the prairie caused his imagination to turn in that direction, but the monotony of prairie life and the absence of "ghosts," as McCourt puts it, probably drive Neil deeper into his fantasies. (At the same time the prairie as McCourt describes it is a setting to test the dreamer severely. The fate of Norah Armstrong in Home is the Stranger is a clearer demonstration of this paradox. Norah is an Irish war bride attempting for her husband's sake to accept the newness, rootlessness and rawness of the prairie. She is associated with two of the typical images of the imagination, houses and water. Jim Armstrong's house expresses only the prosaic limits of the farm life to which she finds herself confined. She conceives a fascination for the old, ruinous Anderson house because it suggests both romance and tragedy. There is a third house, the new house Jim intends to build and which becomes a focus for their temperamental differences. Typically Norah would have it down by the river while Jim wants it up on the prairie nearer his work. In general Norah feels pitted against the prairie without adequate support, and when she is left alone in a blizzard her courage fails her. Desperate for protection, she yields to the romantic Irishman who has been trying to seduce her, and in her demoralized state, allows the baby to die in the storm. Norah is not totally defeated even then. The first sign of her recovery in hospital is her refusal to go away to the coast. She will atone by facing the challenge of the prairie. Her victory, modest as it seems, is not convincing, but it does clarify McCourt's recurrent theme of dreamers failing because they will not face the prairie.

McCourt is probably the only writer to make the landscape itself so threatening. The power of this landscape over the imagination is implicit in his stories, but he is always more conscious of its terrors than of its beauties. What Ackroyd says about the landscape could have come from any of McCourt's novels: " 'It's beautiful, yes,' he said 'But sinister. You feel so unprotected somehow. As if there's nothing between you and all the evil in the universe' " (p. 133). The openness is equated with exposure rather than freedom; the imagination is unhoused and McCourt describes thoroughly one form of inadequate reaction -- to spin romantic fantasies around itself.

We must divide artists from mere dreamers in prairie fiction somewhat arbitrarily because the artists usually fail, and when they succeed we suspect the authors themselves of dreaming. In Salverson's The Viking Heart, for example, Balder becomes a musician, Elizabeth a fashion designer, but their successes are part of the obvious wish-fulfillment which so weakens the latter half of the book. Lilli Landash in Yellow Boots rises to fame as a singer, but again the purpose of her success is so obvious we cannot believe in it.[17] More convincing are those who never demonstrate conclusively that they are artists. Edwin Vickers in Wallace Stegner's On a Darkling Plain, for example, comes more or less empty-handed to homestead a quarter section of bald prairie in southern Saskatchewan, but we know from his letters to friends in Vancouver that he is a minor romantic poet at heart.[18] His faith undergoes a very believable change, too. Wounded in the Great War, he is totally cynical about man and his motives, and hopes to disengage himself from his kind entirely, but he finds he cannot throw himself

on the bosom of mother nature. Not, at least, where her bosom is so hard and flat. He cannot stand being alone with nature indefinitely, and he cannot avoid becoming involved with his neighbours and their slightly simple 18 year old nature-child. Ina, who plays with dolls, is both a living counterpart of Vickers' naive romanticism and a practical warning against the dangers of cultural deprivation. The nearby town stricken with the influenza epidemic of 1918 draws Vickers inexorably, like a whirlpool; but there he learns that regardless of how despicable the reasons for man's great endeavours, the essential worth is in the struggle and the uglier the conditions, the better the qualities of human spirit revealed.

Stegner's imagery of prairie isolation suggests a vacancy extending to an eventual dissolution of human understanding, to madness or idiocy. Grove in The Yoke of Life exhibits darker more demonic possibilities of what the creative imagination can do to itself in isolation. The total disjunction between the idealized world of Len Sterner's adolescent imagination and the world he must encounter day by day leads eventually to a monstrous conviction of sin and guilt which he can overcome only by destroying himself and Lydia, around whom he has created an image of purity. Len may be only a dreamer, but his imagination's uncanny power to transform his surroundings is evidence that he might have been an artist in other circumstances.

Just as the imagination seems threatened in this fiction by the dry sunlit prairie, it is more comfortably associated with water. There are easy associations we could expect in any fiction. Stead, for example, had long been using water as the element of the emotions when

he wrote The Smoking Flax and Grain. In these novels it is slightly associated with the imagination when Calvin Beach begins making his living by writing after he moves to a cottage by the lake. One way of associating water with the imagination may have special significance for prairie fiction. William New, in his article "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World" notes that in As For Me and My House "the recurrent water images seem to accompany an inability to come to terms with reality."[19] He refers directly to such scenes as Mrs. Bentley's walks in the rain by the railroad, but his observation might be extended to a number of prairie artists and dreamers. Norah Armstrong, for example, walks in the rain; she also sits by the river with Brian Malory, her romantic escape from prairie wifehood. Norah dreams of losing her child in water, and she does lose her child in snow through her inability to face the harsher realities of the prairie environment. It is by the river that Neil Fraser's hero Charlie Steele takes his life, talking wistfully about "the setting sun and music at the close." Len Sterner has a life-long attraction to Lake Manitoba, and it is there he consummates his destructive dream, taking Lydia on a quiet voyage along the shore, which seems to be a purification of the spirit for the sacrificial death in the tide-race of the narrows at the top of the lake.

The water imagery in Wild Geese is mixed. The lake has a strong connection with the rich imaginative and spiritual life of the Icelanders. The water of the northern lake country to which the half-breed Malcolm goes is part of a dream of escape from the only reality Ellen has known, though ironically her refusal of Malcolm is a failure to face the

reality of Caleb's tyranny. The association between water and imagination is one which carries over into contemporary prairie fiction. Margaret Laurence's Hagar Shipley, for example, takes her dream of freedom to the old fish cannery by the sea. The dreams of Kroetsch's heroes are linked with rain and rivers, and one of the conspicuous ironies upon his narrator Demeter in The Studhorse Man is that he sits writing in a dry bathtub. Water imagery in the work of Laurence, Kroetsch, and Wiebe will be examined in Chapter Six.

It is remarkable how often we return to As For Me and My House for the culmination of a theme or a vein of imagery. The figure of the artist and many of the implications of being an artist are all drawn together in the complex fabric of Mrs. Bentley's diary. She herself is, of course, the undeniable artist of the novel, though she may mistake her main talent. Her piano playing may, as she admits, have become wooden, but her diary is an artful creation. True to the confessional form, she structures her experience intellectually to uncover the meanings she wants to reveal, though the process, fortunately for the reader, is not completely under control, and we see beyond her declared intentions.

Philip is the artist about whom we are most concerned — because Mrs. Bentley invites us to be and because he appears to be stifled in his art. He lacks Mrs. Bentley's facility for living in the pettiness and bigotry of little prairie towns and in the pain of his own hypocrisy because, however he may deny it, he is visterally connected with these towns, as Mrs. Bentley says:

> He grew up in one of these little Main Streets, rebelling against its cramp and pettiness, looking farther. Somewhere, potential, unknown, there was another world, his world; and every day the train sped into it, and every day he watched it, hungered, went on dreaming.[20]

From this Mrs. Bentley draws the mistaken inference that Philip belongs somewhere else, when his present indecision confirms that as a result of his childhood he belongs nowhere. That is, unless he should manage to go back and recover his roots as a culturally deprived child of the prairie. Mrs. Bentley's own relationship to the prairie is explicit: it threatens her, or at least she thinks a hostile presence into it. As a result, she does not realize how ambivalent Philip's feelings are toward these towns through which they pass. She is puzzled by the way he draws the false fronts in one of his endless sketches of a prairie main street: "False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied. . . . They ought always to be seen that way, pretentious, ridiculous, never as Philip sees them, stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility" (p. 4). Philip is caught internally in the trap of these small towns, and his art shows it, however he may mouth theories of dispassionate form in painting. An understanding of these sketches and of the depth of Philip's feeling of implication in the sins of the small town might have given Mrs. Bentley a surer understanding of her husband.

Seeing the prairie child in Philip, we can feel uneasy about his move to the city, even though Mrs. Bentley engineers it as a means of freeing the artist in her husband. As artist Philip may draw more from the prairie than his wife suspects, and here we must explore

another facet of the well-considered question of Mrs. Bentley's reliability as narrator and as character judge. At least initially she sees the prairie not as inimical to the artist but as a challenge: "I used to think that only a great artist could ever paint the prairie, the vacancy and stillness of it, the bare essentials of a landscape, sky and earth, and how I would look at Philip's work, and think to myself that the world would some day know of him" (p. 59). The vast simplicity of forms which she later interprets as a kind of faceless malice, is first a challenge to the creative imagination. She seems to be articulating the central paradox of the imagination on the prairie from the time of W.F. Butler to the present. Later she quotes Philip's remarks about the artist fulfilling himself " 'when he looks into a void, and has to give it life and form' " (p. 112). At least to an inexperienced eye, the prairie is more like a void than any other landscape, and the artist, as hero of the imagination, must give it form so that it will not become the threatening chaos Mrs. Bentley sees.

We do not know that Philip actually has the talent to be this "great artist," but at times Mrs. Bentley sees it in him: "I've been sure right from the beginning -- sure that there's some twisted, stumbling power locked up within him, so blind and helpless still it can't find outlet, so clenched with urgency it can't release itself" (p. 80). The only unclenching of that power we are shown is during the vacation at the ranch, which is admittedly not bald prairie, but not far from it. It is not foothills country, as it is sometimes carelessly assumed. Since the trees are "scraggly little willow bushes that Philip

describes contemptuously as 'brush,' " and the mountains are "four or five hundred miles west," these hills are in mid-Saskatchewan, probably on the Qu'Appelle or South Saskatchewan River. Philip, working appropriately by the water, releases more aspects of himself into his painting than he has done for years. The picture of Laura's horse, for example, is not just a concession to popular taste as Mrs. Bentley implies; it is a celebration of something more spirited than the dying horses in his mainstreet sketches, and Philip's willingness to seek recognition is a further coming out of his "clenched urgency." The urgency is still there, but on the ranch it seems to encounter its real object. Mrs. Bentley remembers "the day he sat bare-headed in the sun up against the problem of putting eternity into his hills" (p. 107).

It is hard to escape the conclusion that Philip's strength as an artist is released by the land, just as his strength as a man is released by Judith West, the girl from the land. The day that Mrs. Bentley realizes Philip has been different at the ranch, "bigger somehow, freer," (p. 107) she conceives her determination to get him out of the ministry — but not in the direction of that river. Back to the city, where she came from. The move promises to be another in the sequence of well-intentioned misunderstandings which have made up the Bentley marriage. The new cycle beginning with the new-born Philip should, logically, initiate a new set of misunderstandings.

If we are to judge by the action and the imagery rather than by what Ross' narrator tells us, then Philip's example would suggest that the prairie challenges the imagination rather than stifles it. If Philip is stifled, it is by social forces, and Mrs. Bentley seems

to be Delilah-like delivering him into the power of the Philistines. Another necessary inference is that the challenge of the prairie has not been seriously taken up; the "great artist" of whom Mrs. Bentley speaks has not come forward.

W.O. Mitchell is the only major writer in the period of "prairie realism" to present a reconciliation of the imagination with the prairie. Not that he is less sensitive than his contemporaries to the ambivalent power of the landscape. For Mitchell too the stillness and vacancy of the prairie landscape has an elusive beauty and a power to excite the imagination. It is "the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky."[21] Its paucity of detail imposes few limits on either the extent or the direction of the feelings it evokes; it holds the same promise of freedom and the same threat of chaos it holds in Ross, but by emphasizing the promise, Mitchell presents in Who Has Seen the Wind the converse of Ross' prairie. The prairie becomes less a challenge to the imagination than a temptation young Brian must resist. Though the novel is set in the years of depression and drought, the prairie is not desert or Waste Land. It is fertile with creation and with destruction, a delicate balance of contradictions:

> It lay wide around the town, stretching tan to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences." (p. 3)

The wind is the active spirit, the will of the prairie which controls the balance, quite capriciously; yet there is nothing in the tone to suggest a wilderness indifferent to men either. Nature is simply indifferent to man's moral designs; natural order has nothing to do with moral order.

Brian O'Connal is an imaginative child. He begins his search for God at the age of four, for example, and the vividness of his imaginings gets him into some trouble when he holds too stubbornly to the reality of his little friend R. W. God, B.V.D. But Brian is not simply given an overactive fancy; he has moments of transcendental awareness, the first on a "very Sabbath" Sunday morning when he is about six:

> A twinkling of light caught his eye; and he turned his head to see that the new, flake leaves of the spirea were starred in the sunshine -- on every leaf were drops that had gathered during the night. He got up. They lay limpid, cradled in the curve of the leaves, each with a dark lip of shadow under its curving side and a star's cold light in its pure heart. As he bent more closely over one, he saw the veins of the leaf magnified under the perfect crystal curve of the drop. The barest breath of a wind stirred at his face, and its caress was part of the strange enchantment too.
>
> Within him something was opening, releasing shyly as the petals of a flower open, with such gradualness that he was hardly aware of it. (p. 107)

This recurring experience which Brian comes to think of as "the feeling" is his moment of transcendence, of apocalyptic contact with the divine, his "intimations of immortality" as the school principal Mr. Digby would have it. In the perfection of the dewdrops, the unity of the crystal sphere, Brian has intuited a oneness which he goes on searching for through the rest of the novel. Later the same day, in

church, he equates the feeling of his newfound natural religion with the purpose of the formal worship he is attending. When the congregation sings "Holy, holy, holy," he interprets it to mean "unbelievably wonderful — like his raindrop -- a holy holy holy drop lying holy on a leaf" (p. 111). He believes the presence of the Chinese children and the Bens in the same congregation with Mrs. Abercrombie and Rev. Powelly betokens the same holy oneness he has felt. All, of course, is irony, and Brian has yet to learn the dangers of his naive assumptions of the unity of man and nature, of the harmony among men, and of the benevolence of nature.

Brian at first experiences "the feeling" only in nature and identifies it with the prairie, the wind, and God. This is to be expected, since Brian has been powerfully stirred by the prairie ever since his first encounter with it. Mitchell's very vivid descriptions of these encounters have several qualities usually found in romance or in lyric verse — a freedom of metaphor opening up expanses of feeling and generating a warm identification with the young hero. Here is one of Brian's first impressions: "The hum of telephone wires along the road, the ring of hidden crickets, the stitching sound of grasshoppers, the sudden relief of a meadow lark's song, were deliciously strange to him" (p. 11). There is, through the wind especially, a romantic animism in Mitchell's prairie: "And all about him was the wind now, a pervasive sighing through great emptiness, unhampered by the buildings of the town, warm and living against his face and in his hair" (p. 11). Quite naturally the boy identifies his "feeling" with the prairie and not with the town.

Mitchell's town, like Ross' Horizon, is mean, petty and bigotted. Just as sharp little Mrs. Finley rules over Horizon, Mrs. Abercrombie the banker's wife rules this town, and with her servant the Reverend Mr. Powelly she imposes a regularized form of decency which stifles life and which is never without malice. It is strange that Mitchell should twice refer to Conrad's Heart of Darkness in connection with the iniquities of this town. The phrase in Conrad's novel signifies a giving way to a dark primitive nature within, while the Mrs. Abercrombies seek to drive out natural people like the Bens and to deny all natural impulse in themselves as though they feared it. Brian, because he is a child, is unaware of the deeper villainies of the town, such as their bigotry in turning out Mr. Hislop, their efforts to imprison the Young Ben, or their hounding the old Chinese to his death. He encounters only the outworks of that consciousness in the regimentation of the school and especially the discipline of the embittered old spinster teacher who inspires in him presentiments of a mean and spiteful God. The God in nature that Brian himself visualizes requires a great deal of imaginative sweep, and the town is an enemy to imagination. Brian's companions Arty and Fat are true children of the town, as can be gathered from their version of the book's title verse.

> "Who has seen the wind?" Fat chanted.
>
> "Neither you nor I," returned Brian.
>
> "But when the trees bow down their heads -- "
>
> "Nobody gives a damn," Art finished up.
>
> Fat laughed. (p. 191)

Brian, needless to say, cannot share his "feeling" with his playmates.

Brian is at first tempted to follow his "feeling" in the direction of the prairie, to become like the young Ben whom he identifies with the prairie. After seeing the strange boy who lives on the prairie Brian says he does not want to live in a house, that he wants to have "prairie hair" like the young Ben's. But Brian is warned back by a number of things. He begins to see the moral ambivalence of the prairie. The terror of the young Ben's merciful killing of the tailless gopher and his attack on Arty for mutilating the animal Brian can ride over with a kind of exultation in animal spirits; the later sight of the gopher's putrescent and fly-blown body he cannot. "Prairie's awful," thought Brian, and in his mind there loomed vaguely fearful images of a still and brooding spirit, a quiescent power unsmiling from everlasting to everlasting to which the coming and passing of the prairie's creatures was but incidental" (p. 128). Though he does not long retain any sense of cosmic indifference, Brian does gradually separate natural process from ethical process. There is another less tangible fear that assails him the night he runs away from his Uncle Sean's farm. It is the first time he has been quite alone, away from the town, surrounded by the prairie at night.

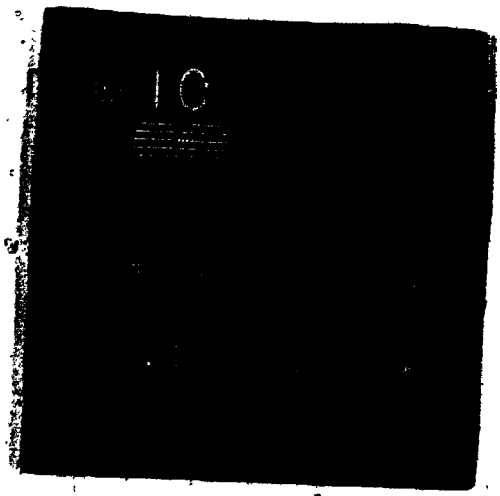
> He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him. As the wind mounted in intensity, so too the feeling of defenselessness rose in him. It was as though he listened to the drearing wind and in the spread darkness of the prairie night was being drained of his very self. He was trying to hold together something within himself, that the wind demanded and was relentlessly leaching from him. (p. 236)

Because of Brian's sensitive imagination, the prairie has the power to excite him, but also a frightening power to annihilate him. Brian can quite happily return to the human security of the unimaginative town.

Brian returns, too, because he is proven too social an animal to belong entirely with the prairie. He feels the growing responsibility of belonging with his family, particularly when his father dies, and he also needs thinking, articulating human beings like Mr. Digby. Total rejection of the town is represented for Brian by Saint Sammy, "Jehovah's hired man," who lives in a piano box on the prairie raising a herd of Clydesdale horses as pets. There is something about the immediacy of Sammy's faith, the fervour of his Jeremiads on the town as "Sodom and Gomorrah" which excites Brian, but the boy always turns back to the sane, if corrupt, town. "Listening to Saint Sammy, he had been carried away by the fervor of his words; he had felt for a while that he was closer, but it couldn't be right. Saint Sammy was crazy, crazy as a cut calf, Uncle Sean had said. A thing couldn't come closer through a crazy man gone crazy from the prairie" (p. 188). The Saint Sammys and the Bens are no acceptable alternative to the Mrs. Abercrombies and the Reverend Powellys of the town. Brian, while drawn in both directions, finds his element among the people on the edge of the town, Milt Palmer, Mr. Digby, Miss Thompson, and with his uncle Sean who is spiritually on the edge of the prairie. Brian's grandmother is another vitally important influence, with her years of pioneer experience of living with the land and with her stake in the human community.

3 3

OF/DE



Brian's most significant experiences in fact occur not in the town or on the prairie but at the point of contact between the two, nature's order and man's. Most of his transcendental moments occur on the edge of town and the edge of the prairie, and the action of the novel grows out of the tension between the claims they make upon Brian, with the imagination drawing Brian in the direction of the prairie, and common sense and social instinct drawing him back toward the town. His compromise of becoming a "dirt doctor," an intermediary between the two, resolves that tension. This resolution ought to be a victory for the imagination. It is certainly an affirmation of life. The last pages of the novel become a vivid romantic lyric on the prairie as a living cosmic organism. But in some respects the ending is a disappointment because the harmony is achieved only by a limitation of the claims of imagination. Brian does not, like his "cousin" Huck Finn, hold a place in his mind where he is always "lighting out for the Territories." The temptations of the imagination are put quite firmly behind Brian. There is a scene in which he tells Digby, "I don't get the feeling any more." Digby thinks of Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode and says, "Perhaps you've grown up" (p. 296). Growing up seems to mean not only accepting social responsibilities but also accepting spiritual compromise, mediation between conflicting forces in place of the imagination's search for a divine unity.

The ending provides a very convenient rounding out of the action, especially the action in town where some very unpleasant things have happened. It is not until we examine this ending that we recognize with a start that Mitchell belongs not in the grim tradition of prairie

realism but in the popular tradition of sentimental comedy. His Jake and the Kid stories, his second novel, The Kite, everything but his most recent The Vanishing Point, which will be discussed later, is characterized by this same final, total affirmation. Who Has Seen the Wind is the consummate example of the popular tradition, with the classic shape of comedy.[22] It begins with the good people, Digby, Miss Thompson, Hyslop, excluded from their proper community, and Brian in particular seeking a way into the community of both man and nature. The human community is at first too bigoted, petty, and hypocritical to join, but in the school-board meeting at the end, Mrs. Abercrombie is ritually driven out, a scapegoat with all the sins of the town loaded upon her. The community thus purged is a fit place to welcome the sympathetic characters. (Forgotten are the firing of Hyslop, the attempts to imprison the young Ben, the hounding to death of old Wong.) At the same time, the prairie is humanized in the comic scene of Saint Sammy calling down the wrath of God on miserly old Bent Candy. Evidently man was never seriously alienated from his natural environment, and in becoming a "dirt doctor" Brian is joining forces with Uncle Sean, who has fairly explicit plans for returning the prairie to the state of a garden.

The success of Mitchell's novel draws attention to the limitations of prairie realism, with its picture of the imagination isolated, challenged, and usually failing to humanize its surroundings. One can say, without intending to diminish their achievement, that the realists generate an unrelieved grimness of outlook which no healthy human being could sustain for long. These writers were, of course, responsive to

literary as well as social history. The role played by literary convention in developing the stark image of the prairie from Grove onward is difficult to define, but it cannot be overlooked. The type of fiction which grew popular with American writers such as Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, with its scrupulous attention to circumstance and its underlying naturalistic assumptions, was well adapted to portraying man as a fated victim of a hostile environment. It did not lend itself as well to celebrating the modest triumphs of the human spirit in adversity. For a comparison one can turn to non-fiction accounts such as Max Braithwaite's reminiscences or James Gray's The Winter Years[23] and find the human compassion and even the sense of humour which survived the depression and drought among the prairie people.

The methods of the realists may have been well suited only to portraying the prairie of those who were alienated from the land, and in that respect they reflect the limitations of the ethnic group they represent. It is easy to forget that the English-speaking were only one of several ethnic groups settling the plains. Though a dominant minority, they probably had a poorer record of adaptation to the plains than other groups such as the German, Slavic, or French. A look at the French-Canadian fiction of the prairies reveals a different fundamental attitude toward the progress which was alienating man from the land. While Stead, Ostenso, and Grove were chronicling the opening of the West, Georges Bugnet, in his Nipsya and Constantin-Weyer in his A Man Scans his Past were lamenting the end of the West.[24] They clearly

identify with a different West, one which was not dominated by man and machine. In Gabrielle Roy's Where Nests the Water Hen, there is also an identification with a more natural West.[25] The periodic movements of the wise mother Luzina Tousignant matches the cycles of the seasons as she goes out every spring to bear her next child. The cyclic imagery extends to the larger patterns of the book as well. Though Luzina's heroic effort to educate her children seems to end in their leaving her, the last scenes of the novel suggest a cyclic return which assures us of the eternity of the forces Luzina is in tune with. The English-language fiction has less imagery of such cyclic involvement in eternal processes. Man is there caught in linear time, the kind of time defined by progress. When man identifies with nature as a beneficent order, man and nature are to be united in some moment of apocalyptic perfection, not in the slow round of the days.

Nor are the limitations of this fiction all directly related to the land. With the exception of McCourt's Music at the Close, these novels give us practically nothing of the very active political life of the time. During the 1930's two national political parties were formed in Saskatchewan and Alberta. And where are such staples of prairie life as the cooperatives and other farm organizations? The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration? The radio? The Winnipeg Free Press? Where, in effect, is the outside world? Like most English-Canadian fiction, the prairie novel is inclined to be private and domestic rather than public. Compare As For Me and My House, for example, with Sinclair Lewis' Main Street. While Ross's novel is

private, confessional, Lewis' is public, drawing in farm movements, making generalizations about the Middle West, slipping even into essays on moral and cultural issues. As For Me is, in my opinion, the better novel because of the intensities induced by its very limitations of scope, but we must recognize the nature and extent of its cultural statement if we are to avoid being misled by the term "realism" into expecting a balanced or comprehensive picture. The privacy of this type of fiction is inclined to emphasize the isolation of the individual and the struggle of the individual imagination which is more hindered than helped by the collective imagination of its culture.

The missing elements, from the United Farmers of Alberta to Eaton's catalogue, are only fragments which suggest whole areas of prairie life untouched by our earlier, realist fiction, and the younger writers of the 1960's and 1970's have not been content within the limitations of that earlier realism. Like Grove's architectonic symbols, that fiction very effectively crystalized one attitude toward life; it achieved for the first time what might be called a finished prairie house of fiction. But the younger writers have felt compelled to set about remodelling the house to accommodate the prairie experience as seen by those whose roots in the prairie stretch back for several generations.

Footnotes

[1]"The Aim of Art," in his It Needs to be Said (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. 96.

[2]This general idea is developed in a different way by Susan Jackel in "The House on the Prairies," Canadian Literature, no. 42 (Autumn 1969), 46-55.

[3]Grain (1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 19.

[4]Wild Geese (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. 33.

[5]Settlers of the Marsh (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 149.

[6]Jackel, p. 50.

[7]In In Search of Myself (Toronto: Macmillan, 1946), p. 385, Grove describes the house as appearing to him a fit habitation for the character of Abe Spalding which had been growing in his mind for several years. In the introduction to Fruits of the Earth (1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. xiv, it is cited as the germinal idea.

[8]As For Me and My House (1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), pp. 44 and 58.

[9]In Search of Myself, p. 227.

[10]Laurence Ricou also defends the ending very ably, though he does not carry the argument quite as far as I do. Vertical Man/ Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 50.

[11]Some of these ideas about Grove's visionaries began in a seminar I conducted including a paper delivered by Kathy Merrett, "Frederick Philip Grove: 'Spokesman of a Race,' " University of Alberta, October, 1970.

[12]*It Needs to Be Said*, p. 88.

[13]Mitchell's children are conspicuous exceptions, but they belong in a slightly different tradition and will be discussed separately.

[14]"Pattern in the Novels of Edward McCourt," *Queens Quarterly*, LXVIII (Winter 1962), 577-578.

[15]*Fasting Friar* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 11.

[16]*Music at the Close* (1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 57.

[17]Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Viking Heart* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1925) and Vera Lysenko, *Yellow Boots* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954).

[18]*On a Darkling Plain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939).

[19]"Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World" in *Writers of the Prairies*, ed. D.G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 187.

[20]*As For Me and My House*, p. 29.

[21]*Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947; rpt. Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), p. 3.

[22]See especially Northrop Frye, "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 163-185.

[23]See for example Max Braithwaite, *The Night We Stole the Mountie's Car* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), or James Gray, *The Winter Years* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), or *Men Against the Desert* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1967).

[24]Georges Bugnet, *Nipsya*, trans. Constance Davies Woodrow (Montreal: Louis Carrier, 1929), M. Constantin-Weyer, *A Man Scans his Past*, trans. Slater Brown (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929).

[25]*Where Nests the Water Hen*, trans. Harry L. Binsse (1951; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964).

CHAPTER VI

TIME AND DISTANCE

> "Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading. Yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form" Marshall McLuhan[1]

Novelists in the 1960's and 70's find the prairie a radically different subject than it was for earlier writers. The prairie of which they write, the agrarian prairie, is past. For earlier writers the rural prairie might be in their individual pasts, but it was assumed to exist still, potentially, somewhere in the present. Novelists such as Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, and Robert Kroetsch write from the conviction that the way of life they depict has vanished or been absorbed into the new urban industrial environment of which "agribusiness" is a working part. New technologies of transportation, cultivation, and marketing are well on their way to completing the job — begun a century ago with the land survey -- of removing man from the grain-growing land of the western interior of Canada.

Whatever relationship was painfully working itself out between man and the land over that century may prove to be not only inconclusive but irrelevant. It could be thought irrelevant, that is, except that several generations of Canadians were raised there, and their experience may be a central part of Canada's national past. As Dave Godfrey said in a radio interview from Toronto, Quebec and Ontario were settled by

the French and the English; the prairies were settled by us as a people.[2] It is on the plains that we acted to shape the land, the native people upon it, and in some degree the soul of our nation. To writers the prairie now becomes less interesting as a thing "out there" which man must encounter in the present and shape imaginatively as well as physically. It becomes more interesting as a territory inside the psyche which must be explored in the past for the sake of understanding the present. In a sense, the struggle for imaginative survival continues, but it has shifted inward, where the prairie of individual and collective memory still threatens the imagination. For this internal struggle to assimilate the prairie experience, art becomes a more obviously appropriate weapon, and the novelists become both more self-conscious about their art and more concerned with its role in making the past real and intelligible.

Perhaps because of the changed relationship to their subject, current writers show a growing dissatisfaction with the methods of earlier writers. Kroetsch is the most explicit about this dissatisfaction, just as he is more innovative in technique and form than his contemporaries. In "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," Kroetsch says, "As I explore that [Western] experience, trying to make both inward and outward connections, I see new possibilities for the story-teller. In the process I have become somewhat impatient with certain traditional kinds of realism."[3] In part Kroetsch's impatience may stem from the general distrust contemporary novelists harbour for the structures of the traditional realistic novel and the conclusions implicit in those

structures. Alain Robbe-Grillet voices that distrust very clearly in his For a New Novel.[4] But the dissatisfaction of Kroetsch and the other prairie writers seems to have a more particular object. Their frequent use of various kinds of discontinuity, from the digressions of George Ryga's stone picker, to the senile wanderings of Laurence's Hagar, to the shifting points of view in The Temptations of Big Bear, to disruptions of narration and logic in The Studhorse Man, all suggest a desire to loosen those traditional structures and make the symbols of prairie experience tell a different story.

Most effects of this new awareness of the prairie and new preoccupation with form can best be seen by looking at several novels by Laurence, Wiebe, and Kroetsch, but several useful generalizations can be made. The growth of a more self-conscious fiction is never more evident than when features are carried over from the earlier novels. The familiar themes, which frequently appear, are not so much retained as taken up again and scrutinized. Puritan self-denial, for example, is prominent in Margaret Laurence's work, but her heroines are of a post-pioneer generation, women like Rachel Cameron, painfully conscious of their repressed condition. Familiar lines of imagery must also be looked at in slightly different ways. The central images of the patriarch, the house, and water provide clear examples. Margaret Laurence has her stern, Old Testament, Scots Presbyterian fathers, like Jason Currie in The Stone Angel, who erects the stone symbol over his wife's grave to "proclaim his dynasty."[5] The narrator, Hagar, thus makes the significance of his gesture explicit. Deacon Block in

Wiebe's Peace Shall Destroy Many is a full-fledged patriarch, leading his people with an explicitly religious zeal, stern, immoveable, and false, not because he is devious but because he cannot face the whole truth. For all his honest faith and unselfish intentions, he is a descendant of Caleb Gare. The prairie father who has hardened Abe Ross against Religion in First and Vital Candle is another. A pious old Baptist, he is like Amundsen in Settlers of the Marsh, using his religion as an excuse to work his family to death for his own enrichment. The nature and significance of these figures is made clear in Wiebe's stories as it is in Laurence's, and the attention drawn to the patriarch is never sympathetic except when, like Doc Murdoch in Kroetsch's Words of My Roaring, he is a paternal figure in decline, representative of an old prairie order passing away.

Like the patriarch, the house is an image set out for deliberate attention in a variety of forms. Usually it is a cultural statement as well as a physical shelter, like the impoverished shacks of northern Alberta in Ryga's Ballad of a Stone Picker or the carefully whitewashed sod huts of Mennonite settlers in Wiebe's Blue Mountains of China. It also continues to express dynastic ambitions, like the house of Gavin Ross that dominates the town in Patricia Blondal's Candle to Light the Sun or the homes of Laurence's exiled Scots.[6] It is important that Jason Currie's is one of a "half a dozen decent brick houses" in Manawaka.[7] It is equally important that the Connor house in A Bird in the House is "sparsely windowed as some crusader's embattled fortress in a heathen wilderness"[8], because the houses continue to

express a reaction of hostility and fear toward the environment. That reaction in current fiction becomes more conscious and explicit, just as Laurence's heroine, Vanessa, becomes acutely conscious of the attitudes the house embodies but remains powerless to change them in herself. Laurence's houses are hardly a celebration of the tradition Vanessa recognizes as her own. The house Rachel Cameron grows up in in A Jest of God is a mortuary, and at that it only makes explicit the sense of something moribund in the heavy propriety of all the brick houses on Laurence's prairie.[9] The absurd reduction of Laurence's imperial houses is the mansion in which Kroetsch's studhorse man keeps his horses. Its English builder, Derek Hardwick, having completed it on the day Queen Victoria died, "intended to keep everything intact as it was the day of its completion."[10] Taking the news that the Great War was over as a German plot to make him surrender his "fort," Hardwick had barricaded himself in and apparently drowned in a well he was digging in the cellar.

Water imagery in the new fiction is also inclined to be sophisticated, often ironic, like the water beside which Rachel Cameron acts out her passion for Nick Kaslik, or the rain Johnny Backstrom promises the farmers in The Words of My Roaring. In the midst of the drought of the 1930's the rain carries all the suggestions of fertility it has in the medieval romances which echo ironically through the pages of the novel. Johnny has other mock-heroic trappings such as a mysterious birth and he is running on the ticket of the messianic William Aberhart. He takes on the traditional quest of restoring fertility to a Waste Land when he rashly asks a heckler at a rally, "Mister, how would you

like some rain?"[11] His comic predicament is relieved by rain on the night before the election, but it is typical of the imagery in contemporary fiction that the rain has a sadly ambivalent value. It wins Johnny the election but confirms him in his fraud; it restores the people's hopes without giving them any substance. It is, like the water in the earlier fiction, identified with dreaming which escapes unpleasant realities, yet as a final twist, we recognize that what Backstrom's depression-weary constituents need most is hope, given on any basis whatever.

If certain themes and images continue to recur, they are now conditioned by the fact that this fiction is a conscious retrospect. The features of prairie life become increasingly objects of contemplation as they cease to be objects of use. Or in McLuhan's terms, as the prairie becomes less and less an environment people actually inhabit, it becomes more and more like a work of art.

It is clear, at the same time, that the tone of these reflections is anything but nostalgic. There is a vein of graveyard imagery, for example, running through a surprising number of the recent novels. Kroetsch's hero in The Words of My Roaring is an undertaker who also appears in Gone Indian;[12] Ryga's stone picker ends by burying his own father; the Cameron funeral parlour from A Jest of God appears again in Stone Angel, where Laurence's symbol for Hagar Shipley is the stone angel over her mother's grave. The implication of a necessary though hard death of something in the prairie milieu is strong, and that something would seem to be transplanted cultural traditions. In the extreme the tone reaches the obvious bitterness of George Ryga's fiction.

The hopeless young farmer in Ballad of a Stone Picker believes himself victimized not so much by the hardness of the land as by traditional and (to him) false values quite at odds with the land. His life has been somehow sacrificed to that of a brother who is sent incongruously to Oxford from northern Alberta as a Rhodes Scholar, and who is himself destroyed by his part in this cultural anomaly. Ryga's earlier novel, Hungry Hills, set in southern Alberta, is also an outcry against the land and especially the Anglo-Saxon society which dominates it.[13] The tone is one of sustained moral outrage and bitterness at what the prairie is to the poor and underprivileged. Laurence Ricou describes Ryga's tone well in his Vertical Man / Horizontal World: "The earth is dead and man is a mean and desperate parasite on the body."[14]

Far from this extreme, it is evident that even an optimistic writer like W.O. Mitchell can be increasingly preoccupied with the failures of our prairie culture. In The Vanishing Point, his main character, Carlyle Sinclair slowly and painfully recognizes that the Victorian system of values he has been helping to impose on the Indians is inappropriate.[15] Sinclair can achieve this realization only through love and with the help of a childhood experience which provides the title for the novel. The term "vanishing point" comes from the perspective exercises forced upon Carlyle by his primary school teacher, Old Khaki. It is the point in the drawing at which the converging lines of roads, fences, and telephone lines meet, the completion, so to speak, of the ordering impulse in a perspective drawing. Into Old Khaki's rigorously disciplined picture of the prairie, young Carlyle had felt compelled

to insert a tiger. The image is a rich one, because perspective is not only a way of drawing, but a way of seeing the world, and Carlyle has the natural impulse to go beyond the imposed perspective, to sense the presence of the tiger in that constrained world. In a similar way, when Carlyle believes he is simply trying to keep "Victoria" in the paths of virtue, he is involuntarily responding to the beauty of the young Indian girl. Mitchell is writing about ways of seeing the prairie, and his imagery brings to mind Wallace Stegner's usual way of seeing it as "circles, radii, perspective exercises." Mitchell's novel implies that a less abstract, more human view is not only possible but necessary.

An almost predictable effect of the contemporary novelists' studied reflection upon the past seems to be a discovery of time as the missing dimension in prairie experience. In the earlier fiction, not only is space a dominant visual impression and a constant practical concern, but it also provides the metaphors for intangible qualities. In As For Me and My House, for example, the Bentleys' failure and frustration is imaged in a series of receding "horizons," while the promise of change is suggested by the spatial image of the railroad running beyond those horizons. The fiction may here reflect a quality of the "westering" mind, which seeks spiritual change in physical movement without much concern for time. As Kroetsch says of westerners in a conversation with Donald Cameron: "There's very little credence given to the notion that we exist in history, in time."[16] Kroetsch is talking about time in human dimensions, measured by the movement of human affairs, the reach of human memory, the descent of generations.

The westerner tends to have rather an apolcalyptic sense of time, to situate himself in relation to the gigantic movements of Christian history of the world, creation, the fall, redemption, the apocalypse. That is certainly true of fictional westerners, as we can gather from successive views of the land as Eden or the wilderness. In As For Me and My House, for example, the dust storms obviously belong to the drought of the 1930's but the year is deliberately vague. The days are marked but we are not conscious of a movement of history beyond them. Grove's heroes are confident that they set foot on the plains on the last day of creation, but they gradually discover they are taking part in the story of the Fall.

When we compare prairie fiction with, say, that of the Atlantic provinces the contrast is striking. The characters of Charles Bruce and Ernest Buckler are preoccupied with time as measured by the generations that inhabit their world, alive or in memory. In the stories of Bruce's Township of Time there is an intricate multiple awareness of time as one generation is imposed upon another.[17] They have what the western fiction most often lacks, a sense of time as cyclic, eternal in its periodic repetition of day, season, generation, but they also show the encroachment of the linear time of the new industrial society. The most complete example is Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley, in which David is torn between his youthful, individualistic linear view of time as something he must catch before it passes him by, and the old tribal, cyclic view of time which governs the valley people who are so close to the land.[18] Closeness to the land may be essential to that

organic sense of time. Until recently not enough generations had yet been buried on the prairie to give time its full human dimensions, so its emergence in contemporary fiction is a very natural result of the writers having a human past to reflect upon. The present generation of writers, the first to claim real ancestors in the land, begin to search through past time and to explore the significance of time. In Laurence's Manawaka there is even a sense of generations living through each other, as when Vanessa recognizes her grandfather in herself: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins,"[19] or when Stacy in The Fire Dwellers feels a hereditary guilt for the injustices done the Tonnere family.[20]

One means to the discovering of time in contemporary prairie fiction has been the use of first-person narrators such as Laurence's Hagar, who enjoy the freedom to move about in time and to reflect on its effects. A visible narrator at the same time encourages the aesthetic distance which allows the prairie to appear as an object of contemplation, an experience completed and contained. The process could be said to begin with Mrs. Bentley, who must have enabled Ross himself to distance his subject, and at the same time enables the reader to remain separate and critical of her story. When the narrator is someone like Hagar Shipley, with whom we cannot identify however much we may admire her, we are even more inclined to interpret the story in the light of her personality. When the narrator is obviously unreliable, like Demeter Proudfoot, we are invited to question the whole relationship between the writer and his subject, or between fiction and truth. And

when, as in Big Bear, we are given a series of narrators with points of view which cannot be reconciled with each other or with the main authorial voice, we have to look for a more complex, faceted kind of truth among the contending fictions of the novel. One inference to be drawn from all this technical freedom is that a generation of writers with their roots in the prairie, no longer as threatened as their predecessors by apparent chaos without, can afford a certain skepticism about their ways of seeing the prairie, can attempt a studied remodelling of their house of fiction.

Margaret Laurence remains nearer to the realist tradition than Wiebe or Kroetsch, and her experiments in time and distance simpler. In Stone Angel, for example, Hagar Shipley's recollections constitute a synoptic view of prairie life from pioneer times to the present. Hagar also introduces a kind of discontinuity, as her mind drifts from present to past, but her descriptions are not wordy or sentimental. They are concise, orderly, astringent in tone. When she returns to the Shipley farm during the drought, for example, she describes the setting in a page or so, of which this paragraph is the heart:

> The prairie had a hushed look. Rippled dust lay across the fields. The square frame houses squatted exposed, drabber than before, and some of the windows were boarded over like bandaged eyes. Barbed wire fences had tippled flimsily and not been set to rights. The Russian thistle flourished, emblem of want, and farmers cut it and fed it to their lean cattle. The crows still cawed, and overhead the telephone wires still twanged all up and down the washboard roads. Yet nothing was the same at all. (p. 168)

Laurence offers just this much to evoke the prairie desert, confidently, as though she assumed that all the chronicles of the drought, including the work of Ross and Mitchell, had established a common understanding of the time, upon which she could draw. That in itself is a relatively new possibility for a prairie writer -- to assume a usable tradition of any kind -- and Laurence makes good use of it.

Similarly, Laurence can now briefly invoke many of the traditional themes of prairie fiction as they grow out of Hagar's life. In this way Hagar becomes central to Laurence's portrayal of the prairie. The experiences of her later heroines, insofar as they reflect the prairie background, could all be seen as variations on themes introduced by Hagar. Her people are archetypal prairie town pioneers, alienated from the new land by pride and an arrogant will to dominate. Here, as in her other novels, Laurence presents this alienation in terms of exile, an approach she first used in her African stories, particularly This Side Jordan, and later developed as a way of understanding her own people. Like the British in Africa, Manitoba's Scots Presbyterians feel themselves exiled in a barbaric land, and Hagar is raised by her father to revere a homeland she will never see:

> It seemed to me, from his tales, the Highlanders must be the most fortunate of all men on earth, spending their days in flailing about them with claymores, and their nights in eightsome reels. They lived in castles, too, every man jack of them, and all were gentlemen. How bitterly I regretted that he'd left and had sired us here, the bald-headed prairie stretching out west of us with nothing to speak of except couchgrass or clans of chittering gophers or the gray-green poplar bluffs, and the town where no more than half a dozen decent brick houses stood, the rest being

> shacks and shanties, shaky frame and tarpaper, short-lived in the sweltering summers and the winters that froze the wells and the blood. (p. 15)

Her description almost opens up to the beauty of the prairie with mention of "the gray-green poplar bluffs," and her tone is full of comic disdain for the sentimental nonsense about castles and gentlemen, yet from the rest of her description we know that Hagar has inherited from her father the attitude of an exile. "Exile" becomes a state of mind, a way of naming the cultural dislocation which leaves the people looking with fear and hostility upon their surroundings and proudly shutting themselves off from them.

Margaret Laurence's work tends to confirm that the imagination on the plains still faces the same problems we have been examining. Many of her images are distillations of the shared imagery of the earlier fiction. The one main image of water in "Horses of the Night" from A Bird in the House, for instance, is powerful and comprehensive. Vanessa's cousin Chris, in from remote northern Manitoba to attend high school, is in many ways the culturally deprived child found in earlier fiction. He is an imaginative child who stirs Vanessa's own imagination, taking her beyond her family practicality. She comes to realize, for instance, that his two racing horses, Duchess and Firefly "only ever existed in some other dimension," (p. 145) yet she goes on believing in Chris. In some way his imaginative world is for her identified with Lake Manitoba as he has described it to her. When he takes her there to camp she recognizes in the lake the terrible loneliness of Chris' world.

> No human word could be applied. The lake was not lonely or untamed. These words relate to people, and there was nothing of people here. There was no feeling about the place. It existed in some world in which man was not yet born. I looked at the grey reaches of it and felt threatened. It was like the view of God which I had held since my father's death. Distant, indestructible, totally indifferent. (p. 148)

As an image of what the unsheltered imagination must confront in the prairie wilderness, this is chilling. It is reminiscent of the darkest intimations gathered by early travellers such as Butler and Grant, as though the first generations of pioneers have had no effect, even as though the terrain defies man permanently with its solitude and desolation. The situation is reminiscent of the scenes of Len Sterner and Lydia beside this same lake just before their sacrifical death. Chris, whose very name suggests sacrifice, is later driven mad by the barbarities of war. In Laurence's story it seems only a choice of which horror the imagination will be sacrificed to. The familiar threat of the landscape to the imagination seems intensified, distilled from the earlier fiction.

In this threatening land, Hagar cannot even call herself an exile; she is of an unfortuante second generation trying to escape from the inherited exile mentality. She is a stone angel, petrified in attitudes of self-righteousness and propriety, another monument to her father's pride. When she marries one of the common local people she thinks she is embracing the real life around her, but she gradually recognizes her choice as a rebellion against her father, and one which only proves how much she resembles him in spirit. Of Bram Shipley and herself she says "we'd each married for those qualities we later found we couldn't bear, he for my manners and speech, I for his flouting of

them" (p. 79). Hagar has made a romantic gesture. She is drawn to the idea of Bram's coarseness and natural sensuality, but her breeding will not allow her to accept the reality of it, just as she is inspired by painted horses rather than the live ones Bram keeps.

The problem, as Laurence presents it, is no longer to contend with the prairie. It is to deal with the residue of that prairie experience which lies within, controlling the character. Hagar in a sense is still paying for the conquest of the land which demanded that the pioneers so ruthlessly conquer themselves. Laurence characteristically presents Hagar's dilemma in both imagery and statement, and as usual the imagery is wiser than the statement. Hagar traces her lack of love, life, and joy to inborn pride:

> Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. (p. 292)

It is hard not to take this eloquent explanation as authorial comment. Laurence can be bluntly explicit about her themes. Because the statement is explicit, it is limiting and it does no justice to the rich mixture of forces conflicting in Hagar's large personality. Hagar is trying to break out, but she is also trying to find her way in, toward those shadowy recesses of herself where love and joy and grace may just survive.

There are two images of water which seem to display Hagar's agony and Laurence's art much better. Throughout the novel Hagar moves painfully from the hard dry sunlit prairie toward the deep shadowy sea.

She also moves from the sunlit logic of conscious will back toward dark recesses of fluid unconscious desires and presentiments. The sea both beckons and menaces her. When she first escapes to the old fish cannery by the shore, the ocean suggests surrender, release, freedom from her chains. "Now I could fancy myself there among [the drowned] tiaraed with starfish thorny and purple, braceleted with shells linked on limp chains of weed, waiting until my encumbrance of flesh floated clean away and I was free and skeletal and could journey with the tides and fishes" (p. 162). The image is given point by Hagar's declared humiliation at being imprisoned in her massive flesh. The sea offers rebirth, a cleansing baptismal plunge. Hagar does deck herself out in sea shells a little later, and she does plunge into depths of her memories, where Murray Lees, with his wine and his own confessions, helps to free Hagar from some of the weight of her guilt for the death of her son John. But that much yielding up of herself is a painful and frightening experience to Hagar. The stone angel cannot easily bend that much, and after the confessional she cannot bear the sight of Lees. She has another vision of the sea as a black gulf to swallow her, suck her out of herself, annihilate her:

> Outside, the sea nuzzles at the floorboards that edge the water. If I were alone, I wouldn't find the sound soothing in the slightest. I'd be drawn out and out, with each receding layer of water to its beginning, a depth as alien and chill as some far frozen planet, a night sea hoarding sly-eyed serpents, killer whales, swarming phosphorescent creatures dead to the daytime, a black sea sucking everything into itself, the spent gull, the trivial garbage from boats, and men protected from eternity only by their soft and fearful flesh and their seeing eyes. (p. 225)

The sea threatens too much exposure of the "soft and fearful flesh"; Hagar regards it as her prairie people regard the wilderness surrounding their "embattled fortresses." Like the lake in "Horses of the Night" it appalls the imagination. Also, Hagar knows in the unvisited depths of herself the sly-eyed serpents wait, created by her guilt, but equally by her stubborn will to remain consciously in control. It must be through her trip to the water that Hagar reaches whatever degree of grace she may have attained at her death. Her final gesture of grasping the cup could suggest that in her own imperious way, Hagar admits the need for the baptismal water or the sacramental cup.

Laurence's use of Hagar as narrator is an ingenious way of juxtaposing disparate events and times, and the novel is structurally simpler than it at first seems. In the old woman's mind with its slightly loosening joints, the continuity of time does not seem to hold; we can follow associations, find new connections of events and feelings. Yet Laurence creates this effect with what are essentially two simple time sequences laid one over the other. One sequence extends over the weeks from the opening until Hagar's death, the other over the years from her childhood to the death of her son John. Both sequences are reflections. Though one is technically in the present tense it does not narrate an immediate, on-going present time. These few lines, for example, summarize several minutes of action:

> After supper they baggage me into the car and off we go. I ride in the back seat alone. Bundled around with a packing of fluffy pillows, I am held securely like an egg in a crate. I am pleased nonetheless to be going for a drive. (p. 93)

There is no randomness; the scene is given in general, logical terms. At times Hagar's present tense is used for panoramic as well as scenic narration: "'We need advice,' I'm sure of that,' she says. Advice to Doris means her clergyman. So once again I find myself, rigged out in my lilac silk this time, conferring on the lawn with Mr. Troy" (p. 118). On such occasions the time spanned, the shift from scene to panorama, and the comments upon events remind us that the present-tense is a hard-worked convention with the difficult task of distinguishing two interwoven narratives.

Transition from one sequence to the other is smooth. A sight, a word, a feeling in Hagar's present will trigger a scene from her past, and she may later be startled from her reverie to find she has been speaking aloud to people long dead. While visiting Silverthreads Home, for example, Hagar is taken back by the hospital atmosphere to the Manawaka hospital at the time of Marvin's birth. Hagar's senescence provides such a natural, seemingly random escape into the past that we may not notice how carefully the order of the second time sequence is preserved. A few pages after the Silverthreads scene her flashback is to a time when Marvin is eight or nine; a few pages later she reverts to the birth of John, and we know John is ten years younger than Marvin; yet each time the association which takes us back seem fortuitous.

At their best the juxtapositions reveal not a random association or the need to preserve the earlier time sequence, but deeper parallels in the action, as when Hagar is planning to run away from Marvin's house to the sea and recalls running away from Bram's house to the

coast. Both escape sequences, begun together in this way, converge on the experience of John's death, the thing Hagar would most like to escape, but which she remembers in the earlier time sequence, and imagines to be happening again in the present. This point is a kind of nexus in the action. In Hagar's alcohol haze the present seems to have touched the past in such a way as to change it. They touch at the point where her pride has caused the one event in her life she can never accept. Dazed by the wine, Hagar forces Murray Lees to play the part of John and to absolve her of guilt for his death. Whether by this absolution or by the act of seeking forgiveness, Hagar is eased of some of her burden, without apparently noticing the irony of what she has done. Years before, she had been unable to bend enough to put on her mother's shawl and comfort her dying brother, chiefly because she despised both of them as weaklings. Now a stranger has provided her with the kind of comforting deception she would not create for her brother.

The great technical achievement of The Stone Angel lies in Margaret Laurence's creation of her narrator. Hagar's age and personality provide the shifting time scales, the necessary discontinuities, the aesthetic distancing for the reader. The character of the cantankerous old woman also seems to have provided Margaret Laurence with just the distancing from her subject she needed, and may explain why Stone Angel is the most accomplished of her novels.

Rudy Wiebe's fiction, like Laurence's, is a search for roots in the prairie past, from Peace Shall Destroy Many (1962)[21] which examines the writer's personal past through Blue Mountains of China

(1970) which goes further into the Mennonite past in Russia and the New World, to The Temptations of Big Bear (1973) which seeks to restore the presettlement past which virtually dropped out of prairie fiction around the turn of the century. Wiebe's novels might well be called a descent into time in more than one sense. They explore progressively more remote pasts in which the author has some part, with the exception of First and Vital Candle (1966) which moves away from the prairie and from Wiebe's background. The novels also find the tension which generates their main action in the descent of spiritual ideals into the world of time, mortality and human imperfections. Most obviously this descent is the source of Thom's anguish in Peace; in a very different way it is Big Bear's tragedy as he encounters the time-oriented mind of the "Grandmother's" society.

Wiebe's work is difficult to place in the stream of contemporary prairie fiction for several reasons. Because it shows such evident development from one novel to the next, we will first have to look at Peace and then at his latest, Big Bear, to form a reliable impression of his writing. Second, Wiebe's affinities are for the realist tradition, yet he does not usually write about a people alienated from the soil. When we open Peace we are reminded sharply that the fiction in English that we have been examining is an ethnic as well as a regional literature. In Chapter I we contrasted the people whose literary fortunes we have been tracing with the Mennonite colonists who "at once accommodated themselves to the climate and all the material conditions." It is of those people that Wiebe first writes, and it is not surprising that he

goes on to write about the Indians, who share this experience of accommodating themselves to the land as well as the experience of facing the dominant English society from without. From their standpoint, as from the Mennonite's, alienation from the land is something imposed upon them by others.

Peace Shall Destroy Many is very much about a people overtaken by time. The Mennonites of the Wapiti settlement have been of the soil for generations, and the state of mind in which Wiebe's young hero Thom Wiens first appears is one of innocent harmony with the land which is incompatible with an age of aircraft and radio and modern warfare. "Thom felt the ground warming with expectations, the ripeness of the earth's belly pushing itself up against the steel of the shares. When he lay with his face in the sandy loam, arms and legs yearning, he was beyond himself" (p. 13). But over him, startling the livestock, fly the practising fighter planes, and Thom is torn by the incongruity. "To grow something took a long time, and the machines for it were slow. There were no machines to pick rocks. But the machines for death were wind-swift" (p. 13). The contrast between fruitfulness and mechanical sterility is sharp, yet Thom is too sensitive to be able to hide in the warm darkness of the earth.

The colony, under the powerful old patriarch Deacon Block, has cloistered itself in northern Saskatchewan to avoid contamination of its ideals, to let time pass it by, as it were, but increasingly its members find that impossible. Thom's father feels the forces that are dragging them from the land. "For him, the Canadian bush disrupted the

whole order of things, for though one could succeed with some Russian Mennonite farming methods, most past standards seemed barely authoritative. Farming villages were impossible, married children had to settle far and farther from their parents, the family was splintered, the English language intruded itself" (p. 21). Here is a rare view from the outside of a society whose order alienates men from the land. David Wiens also sees his moral as well as his practical standards threatened by the new time and place. For Thom the question of values centers upon the pacifism which traditionally justifies a Mennonite's refusal to go to war. It seems that in an age of world war no one can avoid responsibility, and as Thom says, "How do we act according to the fathers in many things of which they knew nothing?" (p. 86). He decides that peace, in the New Testament sense, is not an absence of strife but the inner peace of a reconciliation with God, which must be worked out by encountering life rather than avoiding it.

The Mennonites cannot escape time in the ordinary prosaic sense of historical time. Paradoxically, Wiebe represents this fact in images of cosmic time. In an idyllic scene near the beginning Thom and Annamarie see the Wapiti River by moonlight, but they cannot stay, because they realize that the doctrine which justifies their refuge from world violence must be questioned: "He knew that in this moment behind the hedges of France men lay silent under the shriek of shells, lurking here, peace -- as when only two people, and God, were on earth. But to stay here" (p. 48). They leave, like Adam and Eve, going out of innocence and into time, which has overtaken the whole community. Thom then sees the community in its fallen state; he sees particularly the hypocrisy of

their self-righteousness and the covert violence by which the non-violent protect their isolation. The novel ends in a largely ironic epiphany. During the Christmas concert, the people are called to the stable, where instead of the divinity of man they witness his bestiality, not only in the disreputable Unger brothers lusting after the provocative young teacher, but in the violence of Peter Block and Thom Wiens punching the Unger boys. It seems that we witness a death rather than a birth. It is a "largely" ironic epiphany, because there is the children's pageant in the school which may indicate a miraculous birth for them alone. The actual nativity scene is concealed from the adult audience, who see only the wise men entering the stable. Thom's little brother Hal says that is the part of the play he likes best, "Just the last where we all follow Jackie into the barn one by one to see the baby Jesus — 'course there's nothin' really in there, but after the four fella's go I always feel like there was" (p. 238). With young Hal, who has hovered above the action from the beginning of the novel, Wiebe suggests the possibility of a new generation able to look honestly at man without denying him the divine spark. Significantly it is young Hal who plays indiscriminately with the half-breed children living around the colony.

In technique, Peace is a fairly traditional realistic novel with an ominiscient narrator, a continuous time scheme, and the expected continuity of action. By the time he writes Big Bear Wiebe has moved gradually into a mixture of techniques specially adapted to the prairie realities as he sees them. The narration is discontinuous as Wiebe works with an interplay of a number of voices, a method he also uses

to good effect in Blue Mountains. A third person narrator is joined by several first-person narrators -- Lieutenant Governors Morris and Dewdney, missionary John McDougall, trader's daughter Kitty MacLean, and others. The effect is more than distancing or verisimilitude. It resembles the way the lenses of a stereoscope draw the separate two-dimensional aerial photographs into a single three dimensional illusion. The different viewpoints uncover depth and contour invisible to one, and the "reality" of the vision is not a compromise between views but a new perception entirely.

The several narrators have also been introduced to allow their own characters to become part of the story. Wiebe in some of the narration has tried to capture the sound of their world and the style of the characters as these appear in documents. Inspector Francis Dickens, for example, the son of Charles Dickens, was chased out of Fort Pitt with his small garrison of NWMP on Tuesday, 14 April, 1885. His diary entry for 15 April reads simply, "Very cold weather, snow. Travelled."[22] Here Wiebe has quoted directly from a copy of the diary,[23] evidently because its silences are eloquent, but also for the "voice" of Dickens and for the general air of authenticity that the style of such documents lends. On the other hand, documentary fidelity is not in itself a main achievement of the novel. In the section by John McDougall, for example, there are occasional echoes of McDougall's own writing in phrases such as "our dear wives," but no sustained attempt to copy his style. We are given not McDougall writing but McDougall thinking, his journal style modulated into a stream of consciousness so that it can encompass much broader subjects in shorter spaces. We are reminded of the delicacy of

that task when McDougall says after some digressing, "Believe me I am not one to let my mind wander" (p. 40).

Much of the narration, aside from the very sharp action sequences, has the appearance of being suspended in reflection. Big Bear's own reflections provide the richest medium of suspension whenever the omniscient narrator chooses his as the shaping consciousness of the narration. In Big Bear's mind a judgment of political strategy may be interrupted by a reflection on the taste of buffalo liver or the softness of his second wife. It is partly because of this logic of reflection that the narration, despite its vividness of sensory description and frankness of revelation, remains somehow slightly opaque. It is unlike Laurence's transparent self-explanatory narration, or Kroetsch's narration with its occasional obscurities which demand interpretation. More than most fiction or even most lyric, Wiebe's narration is overheard; it does not demand interpretation but rather patience, a suspension of judgments to wait for delayed significance. What we are first conscious of is the sensory reality of these neglected nineteenth-century prairie experiences. Lieutenant Governor Morris, for example, while waiting for the signing of Treaty Number Six at Fort Pitt can look out of history at "the huge river turning past the tiny peaks of the buildings, coils of it spinning in circles like suns, its grey water so thick, so heavy with silt it seemed to bulge up out of its bed, lean against hills" (p. 17). Gradually the larger significance of these experiences also appears, as when McDougall connects for us a routine government delay, the absence of the savage Plains Cree from this treaty signing, and the Cree part in the Northwest Rebellion (p. 42). We see gradually that these incidents

are as interconnected and as significant to our lives as the chronicled events of civilized Europe.

We see still more slowly that Wiebe is bringing the sensory experience and the larger significance together, though at first they seem to draw the mind in separate directions. At their meeting is the reality of Big Bear's world, which is both more immediate and more eternal than the intensely time - bound world of mechanical values he faces — the world of progress, empire, commerce, and material possession. Big Bear's world is presented, first of all, with greater sensory richness than the white world. Here is a scene of hospitality when his women tend a buffalo carcass that hangs over the fire in the chief's lodge:

> Into the coned warmth of the lodge, a thick weighed darkness of roasting meat and women and firelight and fur; soft darkness of leather and people sweat; darkness moving like raw yearling buffalo hung headless, turning in the complete circle of living and solid sweet immovable and ever changing Earth; darkness of fat's slip and dripping, of birch bark curling light, a darkness soft in flares of burning blood like the raw heat of woman tunneled and spent for love. (p. 51)

Anyone looking for McLuhan's tactile world of preliterate tribal man should recognize here not only the richness but the different balance of the senses before the tyranny of the eye that we find in the white world, even the world of Governor Morris glimpsed a moment ago. Big Bear is a man who likes "to smell his friends about him" (p. 57).

Big Bear is also credited with more enduring values than his Victorian adversaries who are so closely identified with the mechanical horror of the steam locomotive. He sees the basic absurdity of the abstractions they and their surveyors would lay over the land to serve

their unnatural greed. He questions how anyone can choose for himself a piece of the mother earth (p. 28), or how, in accordance with the treaty, he can receive one square mile of land: " ' who can receive land? From whom would he receive it?" (p. 29). In his last buffalo running especially we are shown that for Big Bear the ultimate singificance must visit the immediate experience. The buffalo are, for his band, "hardly more than one belly-stretching meal yet everything for life and this moment that could ever be asked" (p. 127). They provide, for Big Bear, not so much meat as, in the act of hunting and eating them, access to all that is essential and permanent in his world. When he has "run" the fattest cow his condition is one of reaching all the eternal human experience in the moment: "In the circle of sun and sky and earth and death he stood complete" (p. 129). With this image we seem to have moved, in Wiebe's fiction, from a cosmic view of time through a linear historical view to a natural cyclical view which again gives man his place in eternity -- and reunites him with the earth. While The Temptations of Big Bear chronicles the coming of the time-bound mechanical society which in Peace destroys the Mennonite's closeness to the soil, the novel is like a return to that state, because we are drawn gradually into the world-view of Big Bear himself. That is also the tragedy felt in the novel, of course, since at the trial we understand his logic, not that of the whites.

One danger inherent in a very moving novel such as Big Bear should perhaps be marked. It is inevitable that in a time of liberal sentiments the Indian should become a means of voicing our fears about our own civilization. The novelist must always take care to prevent that

purpose from distorting his fictional Indians and Wiebe usually takes ample care. When his Cree chiefs, for example, are having trouble explaining the relationship between the Great White Father and the Great Mother, they conclude, quite naturally, that "there was no order in the white world." But when they go on to say "They talked of nothing else but there was no order; only a kind of inevitable devouring" (p. 62) the reader gets the impression that we have moved on to white fears about a consumer society.

Robert Kroetsch's narrator, Demeter Proudfoot, remarks at one point in The Studhorse Man, "It is then time that I must reconstruct, not space" (p. 85). And of course, on the internal prairie that contemporary novelists explore, time is the essential dimension through which one must travel. In a literal way, Kroetsch designs his prairie trilogy to restore that dimension of time to the fictional prairie. The Words of My Roaring (1966) is set in 1935, and each successive novel moves farther forward as well as farther back in time. The Studhorse Man (1969), set immediately after the Second World War, is equally concerned with the pre-depression life which is passing away. Gone Indian (1973) is set in the 1960's but preoccupied with the pre-settlement prairie of Indian and buffalo. Kroetsch is not mainly retrieving historical facts or, like Wiebe, vividly realizing moments in history. His detail tends to be generalized and indefinite. What he creates is rather a sense of a past in large mythic terms.

From his comments quoted earlier, it is clear that Kroetsch is also interested in the Westerner's unusual sense of time, of not existing "in history." His own characters do see themselves in relation to the

cosmic events of Christian history. Johnny Backstrom is helping to bring about the Apocalypse, Jeremy Sadness comes west in a effort to return, like Grey Owl, to a primitive innocence and harmony. This is one way of representing the constant sense of beginnings and endings that Kroetsch attributes to the prairie people. Many fundamentalists did settle the prairies, but for others as well the exposure to, and utter dependence upon, so extreme and capricious a climate must have encouraged a sense of life impelled, like the events of Christian history, by a logic beyond man, though man might provide the petty causes for political history. That sense of being caught up in cosmic beginnings and endings might also be encouraged by the topography as well as the climate. The prairie resembles the desert of the Old Testament, where the sky is obtrusive, where God is not manifest in things about, which companion man, but in things above, which dominate him. The rather sombre sense of destiny encouraged by such terrain may help to explain the appeal of "Bible Bill" Aberhart, when he rose with his Social Credit Party in Alberta to proclaim the coming of the apocalypse in which the "whore of Babylon," the Eastern banking interests, would be driven out. This coincidence of general world view and specific event in the election of 1935 may have been what attracted Kroetsch to the Aberhart campaign as a starting point for his time scheme of the West. Johnny Backstrom is forced involuntarily into that cosmic calendar by the demands of the people, who want a Messiah. His opponent, Doc Murdoch, may be almost a father to Johnny, but he is also identified with the eastern, Babylonian oppressors. Like the Babylonians he keeps a lush garden, and his daughter is like a goddess of love in that garden. Johnny himself approaches the election as though it were the end of the

world and he himself were uncertain of "election." The first of Kroetsch's novels, then, centers upon that moment in which the West distinguishes itself publicly and historically by its peculiar sense of its place in time. From that point Kroetsch's time scheme and world view expand like ripples from a dropped stone..

Even as the rain falls at the end of The Words of My Roaring we know that the moment of renewal is illusory and that what Kroetsch chronicles is actually the fall of the West. The Studhorse Man is the central narrative of that fall; with Hazard's years in the West it spans roughly the time described in Chapter Four as the transition from rural agrarian to urban industrial West. The horse becomes the appropriate image for the vanishing agrarian prairie not only because of its literal part in pre-industrial farming but because it carries all the associations of freedom and power and pride we attach to the open spaces of the plains. Hazard's Poseidon, being a Mustang and one whose ancestor was passed on by an Indian, appears to represent the spirit of an earlier more untrammelled West. At the end of the war, when the novel opens, mechanization is in the final stages of replacing the free spirit of the Mustang, and Kroetsch gives this loss of the West in terms of fertility. The unpromising state of the prairie is signalled at once by the corn goddess Demeter appearing as a man, an unfruitful man.[24] The fertilizing spirit, represented by the studhorse, is equally frustrated. Hazard can find servicing work only for himself. Because the spirits of virility and fertility are disoriented, the studhorse is finally put in the anomalous position of serving infertility and the sterile commercial world of Eugene Utter, who has been pictured as Hazard's pale shadow.

In his attempt to give the prairie past an appropriate shape, Kroetsch must contend not only with chaos but with false order in the form of careless suppositions about the West. There are inappropriate myths he must deflate satirically, like the millennial myth surrounding Johnny Backstrom, and there are even more persistent stereotypes borrowed from the American West to dislodge. Hazard, the questing hero, the champion of the Old West, the agent of virility, might be expected to resemble the Hollywood Western hero, but look at him. He's not big or strong or handsome or even clean; he fights neither fairly nor well; his most heroic wound is a shot in the behind. He is never in control of his destiny; he is forever being willingly seduced by women, and he is finally killed by his own horse. Hazard is a comic travesty of the Western hero and his exploits. Yet in another way he remains a hero. As we know from his long complaint on leaving the Home for Incurables, he is committed to a vocation which is larger than himself and must pursue it to his own cost. That vocation of breeding the perfect horse is securely identified with the positive values in the novel.

What Kroetsch achieves as he satirizes common stereotypes is not just an ironic reduction of feeling for the West, but a shifting of that feeling to the immediate, local past. He passes essentially romantic figures like Backstrom and Hazard through small town churches, cafés, fairgrounds, community halls, and beer parlours, and through the weddings, rodeos, auctions, and election rallies which were the social staples of rural life in the West and which have not yet quite disappeared. For Albertans especially Kroetsch is making their

experiences more real by turning them into fiction, adding the necessary imaginative dimension. He is offering the prairie imagination its local past in usable terms by mythologizing the commonplaces of prairie life.

The West, of course, cannot escape being a construct in other people's mythology. The one surviving line of Jeremy's dissertation in Gone Indian is instructive: "Christopher Columbus, not knowing that he had not come to the Indies of his imagination. Imagined that he had come to the Indies [sic]" (p. 149). Jeremy's line reminds us of the first conception imposed upon the West, the northwest passage by land. In a similar way the collective imagination in any era will find its own West, but Kroetsch is bringing the search closer to the earth, bringing the myth and the experience closer together.

While Kroetsch works to give the past its missing imaginative dimension, he is obviously skeptical of imaginative order imposed upon life, even the kind of order he is himself creating. In a published interview he once said "The western landscape is one without boundaries quite often. So you have the experience within a kind of chaos, yet you have to order it somehow to survive. I'm particularly interested in the kinds of orderings we do on that landscape." Kroetsch's sometimes awkward self-consciousness about these "orderings" is evident in the strange, almost exhibitionist postures of his first person narrators. The reader is invited behind the illusionist's cape, shown the presumption entailed in shaping a story, yet at the same time he is teased, even taunted into interpretation by a welter of mythic reference and quizzical detail. This ambivalence toward the storyteller's art is most thoroughly embodied in the strained relationship between

Demeter and his subject Hazard Lepage.

Paired or split characters like Demeter and Hazard recur in Kroetsch's novels.[25] There are Peter Guy and Mike Hornyak in But We Are Exiles, Johnny and Jonah or sometimes Johnny and his better self in Words of My Roaring, Jeremy and Professor Madham in Gone Indian. They are intimately linked yet antagonistic, as though to represent some fundamental tension between different aspects of a personality. One of each pair is usually active, extroverted, given over to his own appetites while the other is introverted, reflective, cautious. These Shem and Sean pairs (which may be a quiet acknowledgment of a national schizophrenia) appear with increasing frequency in recent Canadian fiction, from George and Jerome in The Watch That Ends The Night to I and F in Beautiful Losers to Ramsay and Boy Staunton in Fifth Business to Archie Payne and Rafferty in The Wandering Rafferty. The reflective character is usually devoted to order and tradition, an historian recording with a mixture of admiration and dismay the exploits of the acting man who lives not in history but in the mythic consciousness of his day. The two often court the same woman, and there is usually a point in the action at which they become one or lose their separate identities, as Demeter and his subject do when he proclaims himself "D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man." The moment of coming together only emphasizes a fatally divided condition of the will which has a slightly different significance in each pair of characters. Between Demeter and Hazard it suggests a hostility between the creative imagination and its object, especially in the prairie setting.

The opposition between the two is apparent from the first scenes of the novel. Demeter draws attention to his own editing of Hazard's tale. He says, "the scent of spring was in that yeastly wind, the high raw odor of mares and spring." Then he adds, "Already I find myself straying from the mere facts. I distort. I must control a certain penchant for gentleness and beauty. Hazard did not say 'mares and spring.' . . . he said in his crude way, 'That raw bitch of a wind was full of crocuses and snatch" (p. 12). Paradoxically it is Hazard's crudeness which makes him seem to Demeter an apt image of the free and virile West he yearns for. The passage also contains a warning of Demeter's tendency to manipulate his subject, to make Hazard tell Demeter's own story. He cannot resist imposing himself upon the action. He would not simply clean up Hazard's crudeness; he would make of him an Odysseus of the Western spirit. From the "Iliad" at the boneyard until the end of the novel Hazard strives against obstacles (all occasioned by Poseidon) to return to his waiting woman. There are even vague Odyssean parallels in his adventures, like the Circean overtones of Mrs. Lank and her pigs, and there is Demeter's straining for a high symbolic significance. While Hazard is himself a potent symbol of a way of life, he cares nothing for symbolic significance, and beneath Demeter's elevated tone we hear the picaresque tale of Hazard's wanderings as the "page" of his stallion. There is a growing tension between Hazard's experience and the inappropriate molds into which Demeter would force it.

Hazard is also obliged to serve as hero of Demeter's id, acting out sexual fantasies Demeter is too timid to realize. The whole theme

of the virility and fertility of the West in fact acquires a strange, introverted, onanistic quality. Whenever Hazard or Poseidon gets involved in a sexual adventure there is some mention of Demeter's own slow sexual awakening. When describing the servicing of the mare by the lake, for instance, Demeter flashes back to a summer by the lake when, as a boy, he had masturbated while watching Martha rise naked from swimming in the lake. When describing Hazard's antics with Marie Eshpeter, he explains that his relations with Martha have advanced to the point where she allows him to watch her undress. There are two more puzzling instances. After the country wedding, Demeter is parked with a very willing young bridesmaid. At the moment of awakening desire, Hazard appears, probably saving Demeter from something he fears. Hazard has been dreaming in the back seat of the car, and his dream involves images suggestive of sexual fear generally and fear of incest particularly, both of which would be more appropriate to Demeter in his relationship with his cousin Martha. Suspicions about Demeter's part in the dream are heightened by several remarks he makes while recounting the dream: "Hazard, when I attempted to communicate to him my first awareness of the significance of his dream (and this was before I had commenced my very fruitful research), only guffawed," and "Hazard also implied (as I understood him -- and this is the one point where I neglected to make notes, having somehow lost my pencil) that the ultimate horror came at having, while standing on the back of the galloping horse, to leap through a ring of fire" (p. 113). The possibility of seeing Hazard's entire story as a fantasy, Demeter and Hazard as contending

halves of the same character, presents itself and is strengthened by the ending, where Demeter, again on the very threshold of sexual experience with Martha, is interrupted by the sudden death of Hazard. Perhaps the terrible possibility of fulfillment destroys his fantasy figure and Demeter is left hiding from the "flesh and confusion" in the purified form of his writing. Demeter could, of course, prevent the death, and it is by his interference that Hazard is under the stallion's hooves to begin with. One possible inference to be drawn is that when the reflective side contrives the death of the active, the total character is reduced to the sterility of a man sitting naked in a dry bathtub in an asylum.

The contention between Demeter and Hazard, whether internal or external to the narrator's character, is finally an opposition between art and life. When his subject stubbornly refuses to fulfill the patterns Demeter has established, when Hazard appears to be willing to give up his quest and accept Martha, the biographer lays down his pen and steps into the action, becoming "D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man" and indirectly destroying Hazard. It is the violence, not of man to man but of artist to subject which is important here. It completes a long sequence in which Demeter has questioned whether Hazard's reality or his own has priority, whether Hazard's crude remarks or his polished account is the more authentic. Demeter shows that he is troubled by the question as he sets out to describe the horse:

> I hardly know where to suggest you begin. Those old Chinese artists, they drew their horses true to life; true to the rhythm of life. They dreamed their horses and made the horse too. They had their living

> dream of horses. . . . [Kroetsch's ellipses] Ah, where to begin? Why is the truth never where it should be? Is the truth of the man in the man or in his biography? Is the truth of the beast in the flesh and confusion or in the few skillfully arranged lines. . . . [Kroetsch's ellipses] (p. 134)

The dilemma remains. As Kroetsch says, the artist's imagination must impose order if we are to live with the flesh and confusion. At the same time, Demeter's obvious manipulations, his willingness to do the ultimate violence to his subject for the sake of his art, can be taken as a sardonic comment upon the patterns imposed by novelists, especially prairie novelists.

The reference to Chinese art may also point obliquely to Kroetsch's own artistic principles. The "few skillfully arranged lines" force the spectator to participate in completing the figure. As McLuhan says, "Spectator becomes artist in oriental art because he must supply all the connections."[26] A somewhat similar kind of participation is encouraged by the discontinuities in Kroetsch's fiction. By denying the reader traditional continuities of time, logic, even character, he obliges the reader to complete the figures suggested by the few lines. The very lack of completion may be one intention of his method, true to his skepticism about imposing order upon experience.

In his conception of form Kroetsch reacts more directly against traditional prairie realism than either Wiebe or Laurence. His strongest objections to the tradition may be embodied in Demeter as image of the prairie novelist in his madhouse of fiction. Demeter is the novelist as casualty of the struggle for imaginative survival. Threatened with the loss of security and order, he seeks them within the insane culture

which is destroying his subject. There he sits, seeing the prairie only through a mirror and a window, like the Lady of Shalott. Demeter is the absurd extension of McCourt's Neil Fraser who looks for Launcelot and Guinevere in Charlie Steele and Helen Martell. In another sense he is the madness just visible beneath the brittle orderliness of Mrs. Bentley's mind in As For Me and My House.

Footnotes

[1] Understanding Media (New York: Signet, 1964), p. ix.

[2] "Aspects of the Canadian Novel," by Allan Anderson, Program 5, CBC, 2 Dec. 1972.

[3] "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," in Robert Kroetsch and James Bacque, Creation (Toronto: new press, 1970), p. 53.

[4] For a New Novel, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

[5] The Stone Angel (1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 3.

[6] Several of the novels mentioned here will not receive extended treatment in the text. They include Rudy Wiebe, First and Vital Candle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), Blue Mountains of China (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), and Patricia Blondal, A Candle to Light the Sun (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960).

[7] Stone Angel, p. 15.

[8] A Bird in the House (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 3.

[9] A Jest of God (1966; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

[10] The Studhorse Man (1969; rpt. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Pocket Book, 1971), p. 52.

[11] The Words of My Roaring (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), p. 8.

[12] Gone Indian (Toronto: New Press, 1973).

[13] Ballad of a Stone Picker (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), Hungry Hills (Toronto: Longmans, 1963).

[14] Vertical Man / Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 122.

[15] The Vanishing Point (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973).

[16] Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 84.

[17]The Township of Time (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959).

[18]The Mountain and the Valley (1952; rpt. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1961).

[19]Bird in the House, p. 207.

[20]The Fire Dwellers (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).

[21]Peace Shall Destroy Many (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962) is actually set in the bush country on the northern edge of the settled prairie, though still a part of that same pattern of settlement. I stretch a point to include it here because it fits in with Wiebe's prairie settings in a way that First and Vital Candle, for example, does not.

[22]The Temptations of Big Bear (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 271.

[23]LaChance, Vernon. "The Diary of Francis Dickens," Queens Quarterly, XXXVII (Spring 1930), 312-334.

[24]Kroetsch's mythological references are important, but since most of them are not essential to the present discussion I have made no effort to unravel their complexities.

[25]Morton L. Ross, "Robert Kroetsch and his Novels," in Writers of the Prairies (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), pp. 101-114.

[26]Understanding Media (New York: Signet, 1964), p. viii.

CONCLUSION

THE ACT OF NAMING

In examining the encounter of the civilized imagination with the prairie environment, I have tended to emphasize that "impact of the landscape upon the mind" of which Henry Kreisel speaks. The most common reaction to the shock of that impact has been seen as a withdrawal into the shelter of a sometimes inappropriate cultural order. Those who have continued to feel threatened and apprehensive in the presence of that landscape have settled into what Northrop Frye has called a "garrison mentality." I have emphasized this reactive, defensive function of the imagination because the most critically respected fiction of the prairies emphasizes it. But this prairie realist's view, as we have seen, is limited and must be balanced with an awareness of more positive responses to the newness and strangeness of the land.

The fiction itself is evidence that the literary imagination has not retreated but has set about naming the new land and giving verbal form to the new experience. It may be moved, as the realists suggest, by the fear that chaos will overwhelm it, or equally, by a feeling that the unformed experience is insufficiently real and permanent until it is verbalized. This outgoing impulse of the imagination is not often explicitly recognized in prairie fiction, but one Alberta writer we have not discussed provides a vivid description of it. Howard O'Hagan writes chiefly about the mountain and foothills area, but what his narrator,

John Denham, says about new country in Tay John can easily be extended to the unsettled prairie. Denham describes how a new mountain valley lures even the experienced bush man who knows it will be much like others he has seen:

> Yet still he goes up it hoping vaguely for some revelation, something he has never seen or felt before, and he rounds a point or pushes his head over a pass, feeling that a second before, that had he come a second earlier, he would have surprised the Creator at his work -- for a country where no man has stepped before is new in the real sense of the word, as though it had just been made, and when you turn your back upon it you feel that it may drop back again into the dusk that gave it being. It is only your vision that holds it in the known and created world. It is physically exhausting to look on unnamed country. A name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it. The unnamed -- it is the darkness unveiled.[1]

The imagination in this figure is not charting the country to shut it away in a safe, familiar enclosure of words, but naming to hold the new experience in the reachable area of the known world. The psyche is here not afraid of its own annihilation but of the possible extinction of the new, formless experience. In prairie fiction a similar reaching out to hold the experience is first apparent in what I have described as the documentary realism of the Nineteenth Century. A similar desire can be felt in the exuberance of Ralph Connor's foothills stories and in the other early romances celebrating the garden vision of the West. In a more profound way, the outgoing imagination is expressed in Mitchell's Brian O'Connal, who wants so much to capture and know what he feels of the eternal in the prairie. Even the grim atmosphere of Mrs. Bentley's diary in As For Me and My House admits this reaching impulse, never

completely stifled, in Philip's attempts to "get eternity into his hills."

The emphasis in the fiction upon conflict between the imagination and the prairie suggests that this country has been a particularly difficult one to name, at least for imaginations steeped in a European tradition. The searching and experimentation of contemporary novelists are signs that the work of naming continues, though it is the more complex undertaking of putting a name to several generations' experience on the prairie and holding it in the known world before it can "drop back again into the dusk that gave it being." Naming in fact becomes an explicit subject in Rudy Wiebe's The Temptation of Big Bear, when the abyss which yawns between the imposed white culture and the native culture of the plains is revealed by a mutual inability to name the elements of each other's world. Wiebe offers the evident suggestion that as long as we have only a European name for a prairie experience we can never make it entirely ours.

If contemporary novelists have not found the consummate embodiment of prairie experience, the verbal magic to hold it permanently in the known and created world, they have shown a growing awareness of the full difficulty of their task -- even a healthy skepticism about creating the final form for the experience. Again O'Hagan's view from the mountain can be helpful:

> Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down -- and when you have finished, the story remains, something beyond your touch, resistant to your siege; unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain. You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude. (p. 167)

The image for the inviolate mystery could as easily have been a prairie as a mountain. In a curious way, this image provides an earlier formulation of Demeter's dilemma in The Studhorse Man, but instead of Demeter's pompous statement about the claims of art and of imagination, it exhibits a simple humility before the acknowledged mystery of life. Kroetsch, to judge by his irony toward Demeter, shares O'Hagan's attitude, and probably the best assurance we have of the continuing recreation of prairie life into the stuff of imagination is in this humility. An imagination assured of survival can acknowledge the impossibility of ever totally capturing its subject.

Footnotes

[1]Tay John (1939; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 80.

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

Primary Sources

Allen, Ralph. Peace River Country. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

Amy, Wm. Lacey. Return of Blue Pete. New York: Doran, 1922.

Ballantyne, R.M. Red Man's Revenge. Toronto: Musson, 1886.

Begg, Alexander. Dot it Down. Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1871.

Beynon, Frances. Aleta Day. London: C.W. Daniel, 1919.

Bindloss, Harold. Lorimer of the Northwest. New York: A.L. Burt, 1909.

Blondal, Patricia. A Candle to Light the Sun. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960.

Bridle, A. Hansen; A Novel of Canadianization. Toronto: Macmillan, 1924.

Brooker, Bertram. Think of the Earth. Toronto: Nelson, 1936.

Butler, William F. Red Cloud the Solitary Sioux. London: Burns and Oates, 1882.

Collins, J.E. Annette, the Metis Spy. Toronto: Rose-Belford, 1886.

--------. The Story of Louis Riel. 1885; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970.

Cormack, Barbara. The House. Toronto: Ryerson, 1955.

Cullum, R. The Story of Foss River Ranch. New York: A.L. Burt, 1903.

Curwood, James Oliver. The River's End. Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1919.

--------. Steele of the Royal Mounted. 1911; rpt. Montreal: Pocketbooks, 1946.

Daunt, Achilles. In the Land of the Moose, Bear, and Beaver. London: Thomas Nelson, 1890.

Dickson, Lovat. Out of the West Land. London: Collins, 1944.

Durkin, Douglas. The Lobstick Trail. Toronto: Musson, 1921.

Eggleston, Wilfrid. The High Plains. Toronto: Macmillan, 1938.

Fraser, W.A. Mooswa and Others of the Boundaries. Toronto: William Briggs, 1900.

Freedman, Benedict and Nancy. Mrs. Mike. New York: Coward - McCann, 1947.

Garrioch, A.C. A Hatchet Mark in Duplicate. Toronto: Ryerson, 1929.

Gill, E.A.W. Love in Manitoba. Toronto: Musson, n.d.

Godfrey, Denis. No Englishman Need Apply. Toronto: Macmillan, 1965.

Gordon, Charles. Corporal Cameron. Toronto: Westminster, 1910.

--------. The Foreigner. Toronto: Westminster, 1909.

--------. Gwen, An Idyll of the Canyon. Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1899.

--------. The Major. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1917.

--------. Patrol of the Sundance Trail. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914.

--------. The Sky Pilot. Toronto: Westminster, 1899.

--------. To Him That Hath. New York: Doran, 1921.

Grove, F.P. Fruits of the Earth. 1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965.

--------. Our Daily Bread. Toronto: Macmillan, 1928.

--------. Settlers of the Marsh. 1925; rpt. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1966.

--------. "Snow" in Robert Weaver, ed. Canadian Short Stories. Toronto: Oxford, 1967.

--------. Tales from the Margin: The Selected Stories of Frederick Philip Grove. Edited by Desmond Pacey. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971.

--------. The Yoke of Life. Toronto: Macmillan, 1930.

Harrison, Frank. Step Softly on the Beaver. London: Carsell, 1971.

Hayes, H.K. Prairie Pot-Pourri. Winnipeg: The Stovel Co., Printers, 1895.

Hendryx, James Beardsley. Gold and the Mounted. Garden City: Doubleday Doran, 1928.

Henham, Ernest G. Menotah, A Tale of The Riel Rebellion. London: Hutchinson, 1897.

Hiebert, Paul. Sarah Binks. 1947; rpt. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1964.

--------. Willows Revisited. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

Hunter, Francis J. Colonel Gascoigne, V.C. A Story of Travel, Adventure and Love. Montreal: Author, n.d.

Hunter, Robert. Erebus. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

Jarvis, W.H.P. Letters of a Remittance Man to his Mother. London: John Murray, 1908.

Kingston, W.H.G. Rob Nixon, The Old White Trapper. London: Society for the Propagation of Christian knowledge, n.d.

Kreisel, Henry. The Betrayal. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964.

Kroetsch, Robert. But We are Exiles. Toronto: Macmillan, 1965.

--------. Gone Indian. Toronto: New Press. 1973.

--------. The Studhorse Man. Toronto: Macmillan, 1969.

--------. The Words of My Roaring. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966.

Kroetsch, Robert and James Bacque. Creation. Toronto: New Press, 1970.

Laurence, Margaret. A Bird in the House. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

--------. A Jest of God. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966.

--------. The Stone Angel. 1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

Laut, Agnes C. Lords of the North. Toronto: Ryerson, 1900.

Livesay, Dorothy. "A Prairie Sampler," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 85-92.

Lysenko, Vera. Westerly Wild. Toronto: Ryerson, 1956.

Lysenko, Vera. Yellow Boots. Toronto: Ryerson, 1954.

Lyttleton, E.J. The Lawbringers. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913.

McClung, Nellie. Black Creek Stoppinghouse. Totonto: William Briggs, 1912.

--------. Flowers for the Living. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1931.

--------. Painted Fires. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1925.

--------. Purple Springs. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1921.

--------. The Second Chance. New York: Doubleday Page, 1910.

--------. Sowing Seeds in Danny. New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1908.

--------. When Christmas Crossed "The Peace". Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1923.

McCourt, Edward. Fasting Friar. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963.

--------. The Flaming Hour. Toronto: Ryerson, 1947.

--------. Home is the Stranger. Toronto: Macmillan, 1950.

--------. Music at the Close. 1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966.

--------. Walk Through the Valley. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958.

Mackie, John. Canadian Jack. Toronto: Bell and Cockburn, 1913.

--------. The Devil's Playground, A Story of the Wild Northwest. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1894.

--------. The Heart of the Prairie. London: Nisbet, n.d.

--------. The Prodigal's Brother, a Story of Western Life. London: Jarrold and Sons, 1899.

--------. The Rising of the Red Man, a Romance of the Louis Riel Rebellion. London: Jarrold, n.d. [1904].

--------. Sinners Twain, a Romance of the Great Lone Land. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895.

MacLean, John. The Warden of the Plains and Other Stories of Life in the Canadian North-west. Toronto: William Brigs, 1896.

Macmillan, Don. Rink Rat. Toronto: Dent, 1949.

McNamee, James. Them Damn Canadians Hanged Louis Riel! Toronto: Macmillan, 1971.

Marlyn, John. Under the Ribs of Death. 1957; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964.

Mercier, Anne and Violet Watt. A Home in the North-West. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, n.d. [1894]

--------. The Red House by the Rockies. Toronto: Musson, 1896.

Mitchell, Ken. Wandering Rafferty. Toronto: Macmillan, 1972.

Mitchell, W.O. Jake and the Kid. Toronto: Macmillan, 1961.

--------. The Kite. Toronto: Macmillan, 1962.

--------. The Vanishing Point. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

--------. Who Has Seen the Wind. Toronto: Macmillan, 1947.

Moore, Amos. Royce of the Royal Mounted. Winnipeg: Harlequin, 1950.

Morton, James. Polson's Probation, A Story of Manitoba. Toronto: William Briggs, 1897.

Mowery, William Byron. Tales of the Mounted Police. New York: Airmont Book, 1953.

Niven, F.J. The Flying Years. London: Collins, 1935.

--------. Mine Inheritance. London: Collins, 1940.

Olson, Oscar. Mountie on Trial. Toronto: Ryerson, 1953.

Ostenso, Martha. Wild Geese. 1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961.

Parker, Gilbert. An Adventurer of the North. London: Methuen, 1895.

--------. Northern Lights. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1909.

--------. Pierre and his People. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1897 [1892].

--------. Wild Youth and Another. Toronto: Copp Clark, [1919].

Pocock, Roger. The Cheerful Blackguard. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1915.

Pocock, H.R.A. Tales of Western Life. Ottawa: C.W. Mitchell, 1888.

Reville, F.D. A Rebellion. Brantford: Hurley Printing, 1912.

Robinson, Frank. Trail Tales of Western Canada. London: Marshall Bros., [1914].

Ross, Sinclair. As For Me and My House. 1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957.

--------. The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

--------. The Well. Toronto: Macmillan, 1958.

--------. Whir of Gold. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

Rowe, Lizzie. An Old Woman's Story. Regina: The Leader Printing Company, 1886.

Russell, Sheila Mackay. The Living Earth. Toronto: Longmans, 1954.

Ryga, George. Ballad of a Stone Picker. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966.

--------. Hungry Hills. Toronto: Longman's, 1963.

Sallans, G.H. Little Man. Toronto: Ryerson, 1942.

Salverson, L.G. The Dark Weaver. Toronto: Ryerson, 1937.

--------. The Viking Heart. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1925.

Saxby, Argyll. The Taming of the Rancher. London: Partridge, n.d.

Sinclair, Bertrand. Raw Gold. New York: Dillingham, 1907.

Sluman, Norma Pauline. Blackfoot Crossing. Toronto: Ryerson, 1959.

Stead, R.J.C. The Bail Jumper. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914.

--------. The Cow Puncher. Toronto: Musson, 1918.

--------. Dennison Grant. Toronto: Musson, 1920.

--------. Grain. 1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963.

--------. The Homesteaders. Toronto: Musson, 1916.

--------. Neighbours. Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922.

--------. The Smoking Flax. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924.

Steele, H.E.R. Ghosts Returning. Toronto: Ryerson, 1950.

--------. Spirit-of-Iron. New York: A.L. Burt, 1923.

Stegner, Wallace. Big Rock Candy Mountain. New York: Hill and Wang, 1938.

--------, On a Darkling Plain. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939.

Storey, Arthur. Prairie Harvest. Toronto: Ryerson, 1959.

Stringer, Arthur. The Mudlark. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931.

--------. The Prairie Child. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922.

--------. The Prairie Mother. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920.

--------. The Prairie Wife. New York: A.L. Burt, 1915.

Taylor, Gladys Tall Pine Roots. Toronto: Ryerson, 1956.

Tennyson, Bertram. The Land of Napioa and Other Essays in Prose and Verse. Moosomin, NWT: Spectator Printing and Publishing Co., 1896.

Van der Mark, Christine. Honey in the Rock. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966.

--------. In Due Season. Toronto: Oxford, 1947.

White, S.A. North of the Border. New York: Phoenix, 1940.

--------. Northwest Law. New York: Phoenix, 1942.

Wiebe, Rudy. The Blue Mountains of China. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

--------. First and Vital Candle. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.

--------. Peace Shall Destroy Many. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962.

--------. ed. Stories from Western Canada. Toronto: Macmillan, 1972.

--------. The Temptations of Big Bear. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.

Williams, Flos. Fold [redacted]e. Toronto: Ryerson, 1950.

Wiseman, Adele. The Sacrifice. Toronto: Macmillan, 1956.

Young, Egerton Ryerson. Oowikapun or How the Gospel Reached the Nelson River Indians. Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1896.

Zero [psued.]. One Mistake. Montreal: Canadian Banknote Company, 1888.

Other Fiction Cited

Bruce, Charles. The Township of Time. Toronto: Macmillan, 1959.

Buckler, Ernest. The Mountain and the Valley. 1952; rpt. Toronto; McClelland and Stewart, 1961.

Bugnet, Georges. Nipsya. Translated by Constance Davies Woodrow. Montreal: Louis Carrier, 1929.

Cather, Willa. My Antonia. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918.

Constantin-Weyer, M. A Man Scans his Past. Translated by Slater Brown. Toronto: Macmillan, 1929.

Grove, F.P. Master of the Mill. 1944; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

---. A Search for America. 1927; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971.

Laurence, Margaret. The Fire Dwellers. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969.

---. This Side Jordan. London: Macmillan, 1960.

Lewis, Sinclair. Main Street. New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1920.

O'Hagan, Howard. Tay John. 1939; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Roy, Gabrielle. Where Nests the Water Hen. Translated by Harry L. Binesse. 1951; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964.

Bibliographies

Bell, Inglis F., ed. "Canadian Literature — 1959: A Checklist," Canadian Literature, no. 3 (Winter 1960), 91-108. [A Continuing Annual Compilation through 1971 under changing compilers.]

Bell, Inglis F. and Susan W. Port. Canadian Literature / Litterature Canadienne, 1959-1963. A checklist of creative and critical writings, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1966.

Canadian Index to Periodicals and Documentary Films 1948-1959; 1960-. Ottawa, Canadian Library Association and National Library of Canada, 1960-. Monthly.

Canadian Periodical Index. Windsor, Public Library, 1932. Cumulation of quarterly issues 1929-31, continued issues, 1932.

Canadian Periodical Index. 1938-1947. Toronto: Public Libraries Branch, Ontario Department of Education, 1939-1949.

Canadian Theses; A List of Theses Accepted by Canadian Universities in 1952. Ottawa, National Library, 1953. Not published 1953-1959, but resumed 1960-61 to 1964-65.

Canadiana: A List of Publications of Canadian Interest. Ottawa, Bibliographic Center, National Library, 1950--.

Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities 1933-34 to 1954-55. 17 vols. New York, 1934-55.

Hubbell, Jay B. and E.E. Leisy. "Doctoral Dissertations in American Literature," American Literature, IV (January 1933), 419-465.

Humanities Research Council of Canada. Canadian Graduate Theses in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1921-1946. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1951.

"Index to American Doctoral Dissertations," in Dissertation Abstracts, Ann Arbor, 1955-56 --.

Index to Theses Accepted for Higher Degrees in the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland, 1950 - 51 --.

Klinck, Carl F., comp., "Canada" in "Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature 1965," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, no. 2 (December 1966), 39-55 [a continuing annual series with changing compilers].

--------. ed. "Canadian Literature -- 1959, a Checklist: Theses," Canadian Literature, no. 3 (Winter 1960), 108 [Annual to 1971].

--------. comp. "Post-Graduate Theses in Canadian Literature: English and English-French Comparative," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Summer 1972), 68-73 [an annual compilation under changing compilers].

Leary, Lewis. "Doctoral Dissertations in American Literature 1933-1948," American Literature, XX (1948), 169-230.

Naaman, Antoine Youssef. Guide bibliographique des thèses littéraires canadiennes de 1921 a 1969. Montreal: Cosmos, 1970.

Nesbitt, Bruce, ed. "Canadian Literature 1972; An Annotated Bibliography," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Spring 1973), 99-150, annual [?].

Peel, Bruce Braden, comp. Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953. 2nd ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Watters, R.E., comp., A Checklist of Canadian Literature and Background Materials, 1628-1960. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

Watters, R.E. and Inglis F. Bell, comps. On Canadian Literature 1806-1960. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

History and Background

Atkin, Ronald. Maintain the Right. London: Macmillan, 1973.

Atwood, Margaret. Journals of Susanna Moodie. Toronto: Oxford, 1970.

Barr, John J. and Owen Anderson, eds. The Unfinished Revolt; Some Views on Western Independence. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971.

Braithwaite, Max. The Night We Stole the Mountie's Car. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971.

Butler, William F. The Great Lone Land. 1872; rpt. Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1968.

Careless, J.M.S. and R. Craig Brown, eds. The Canadians 1867-1967. Toronto: Macmillan, 1967.

Cheadle, W.B. and Viscount Milton. The North-West Passage by Land. 1865; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970.

Coves, Elliott, ed. The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson 1799-1814. 2 vols. Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1897.

Dawson, C.A. and Eva R. Younge. Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process. Toronto: Macmillan, 1940.

Gard, Robert E. Johnny Chinook. 1945; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1967.

Grant, George Munro. Picturesque Canada. 2 vols. Toronto: Belden Bros., 1882.

Gray, James H. The Boy from Winnipeg. Toronto: Macmillan, 1970.

--------. Men Against the Desert. Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1967.

--------. The Winter Years. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966.

Grove, F.P. Over Prairie Trails. 1922; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960.

--------. The Turn of the Year. Toronto: Macmillan, 1929.

Harper, J. Russell. Painting in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Henday, Anthony. York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55. Edited by Lawrence Burpee. Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd ser., I (1907-08), Section II.

Hewlett, A.E.M. A Saskatchewan Historic Site, Cannington Manor Historic Park. Saskatchewan Diamond Jubilee and Canada Centennial Corporation, 1967.

Hill, Douglas. The Opening of the Canadian West. London: Heineman, 1967.

Horn, Michiel, ed. The Dirty Thirties. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972.

Howard, Joseph Kinsey. Strange Empire. New York: William Merrow, 1952.

Kane, Paul. Wanderings of an Artist. 1858; rpt. Toronto: Radisson Society, 1925.

Kirby, George W. The Broken Trail. Toronto: William Briggs, 1909.

Kroetsch, Robert. Alberta. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.

LaChance, Vernon. "The Diary of Francis Dickens," Queens Quarterly, XXXVII (Spring 1930), 312-334.

Livesay, Dorothy. "A Prairie Sampler," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 85-92.

McClung, Nellie. The Next of Kin. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1917.

McDougall, John, Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie. Toronto: William Briggs, 1898.

MacGregor, James G. A History of Alberta. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972.

--------. North-West of 16. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958.

Mackenzie, Alexander. Voyages. 1801; rpt. Toronto: Radisson Society, 1927.

Mackintosh, W.A. Prairie Settlement, The Geographical Setting. Toronto: Macmillan, 1934.

MacLeod, Margaret Arnett and W.L. Morton. Cuthbert Grant of Grantown. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963.

McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media. New York: Signet, 1964.

McLuhan, Marshall and Wilfred Watson. From Cliché to Archetype. New York: Viking, 1970.

Milton, Viscount and W.B. Cheadle. The North-West Passage by Land. 1865; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970.

Morton, Arthur S. History of the Canadian West to 1870-71. London: Thomas Nelson, n.d.

Morton, W.L. Manitoba, a History. 2nd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.

-------. "Seeing an Unliterary Landscape," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 1-10.

150 Years of Art in Manitoba: Struggle for a Visual Civilization. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1970.

Palliser, John. Exploration - British North America. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1863.

Public Archives of Canada. The Diary of Lizzie McFadden, c. 1879, 39p.

Public Archives of Canada. "Extracts from A Diary of the March with Colonel Otter to relieve Battleford." 24 p.

Public Archives of Canada. "Jottings on the March from Fort Garry to Rocky Mountains, 1874," by James Finlayson. 21p.

Public Archives of Canada. "Journal of Western Canadian Tours 1872-1873," by William J. Christie, 23p.

Public Archives of Canada. "My Four Years of Experience in the North-West of America," 20p.

Public Archives of Canada. Narrative of Years with the McDougalls at Morley, 1875-1896, by Andrew Sibbald, 6p.

Public Archives of Canada. Notes from George Murdoch's Diary, first Mayor of Calgary, 1883-1886.

Public Archives of Canada. "Old Fort Garry in the Seventies," by William Morris, 1900-1912, 15p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "The Battleford Trail," by E. Pauline Johnson, 1902, 7 p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. Diary of William Wallace Clarke, 20p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. Extracts of a memoir of life in Manitoba and British Columbia, 1872-1928, by Henry Halpen. 18 p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "Iteskawin," the story of the Sioux wife of NWMP Inspector Jervix, by John O'Kute-sica, 15 pages.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "Life of an English Emigrant," by P.D. Watton, 10p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. Reminiscences of pioneering in Estevan area from 1905, by August Dahlman, 25p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "The Saskatchewan Collection of Indian Portraits by Edmund Morris."

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "Thirty Years Ago on the Whitemud River or the Last of the Open Range," by Harry Otterson, c.1937, 22p.

Public Archives of Saskatchewan. "What I Remember of Pioneer Days in Wood River Distric," 7p.

Rasky, Frank. The Taming of the Canadian West. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

Reaney, James. "Manitoba as a Writer's Environment," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 95-97.

Stanley, G.F.G. Louis Riel. Toronto: Ryerson, 1963.

Stegner, Wallace. Wolf Willow. New York: Viking, 1955.

Story, Norah. The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature. Toronto: Oxford, 1967.

Whillans, James W. First in the West; The Story of Henry Kelsey, Discoverer of Canadian Prairies. Edmonton: Applied Art Products, 1955.

Wright, James F.C. Saskatchewan: the History of a Province. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955.

Young, Egerton Ryerson. On the Indian Trail and Other Stories of Missionary Work among the Cree and Salteaux Indians. London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.

Young, Egerton Ryerson. Stories from Indian Wigwams and Northern Campfires. 1893; rpt. Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1970.

General Criticism and Scholarship

Anderson, Allan. "Aspects of the Canadian Novel," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Program no. 5, 2 Dec. 1972.

Atwood, Margaret. Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

Cameron, Donald. Conversation with Canadian Novelists. 2 vols. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

Eggleston, Wilfrid. The Frontier and Canadian Letters. Toronto: Ryerson, 1957.

Folsom, James K. The American Western Novel. New Haven: College and University Press, 1966.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Fussell, Edwin. American Literature and the American West. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Grove, F.P. It Needs to Be Said. Toronto: Macmillan, 1929.

Hornyansky, Michael. "Countries of the Mind," Tamarack Review, no. 26 (Winter 1963), 58-68.

--------. "Countries of the Mind, II" Tamarack Review, no. 27 (Spring 1963), 80-89.

Jackel, Susan. "The House on the Prairies," Canadian Literature, no. 42 (Autumn 1969)

Jones, D.G. Butterfly on Rock. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.

Klinck, Carl F. gen. ed. Literary History of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press,

Kreisel, Henry. "The Prairie; a State of Mind," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 4th ser., VI (June 1968), 171-180.

McCourt, Edward. The Canadian West in Fiction. Revised Edition. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970.

Mandel, Eli, ed. Contexts of Canadian Criticism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Meyer, Roy W. The Middle-Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

New, W.H. Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature. Toronto: New Press, 1972.

Pacey, Desmond. Creative Writing in Canada. Toronto: Ryerson, 1961.

Ricou, Laurence. Vertical Man / Horizontal World. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. For a New Novel. Traslated by Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press, 1966.

Smith, Henry Nash. Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

Stephens, D.G. ed. Writers of the Prairies. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973.

Stevenson, Lionel. "Land of Open Spaces," in his Appraisals of Canadian Literature. Toronto: Macmillan, 1926, 236-244.

Story, Norah. Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature. Toronto: Oxford, 1967.

Sylvestre, Guy, Brandon Conron and Carl F. Klinck. Canadian Writers / Ecrivains Canadiens. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.

Tallman, Warren. "Wolf in the Snow: Part One, Four Windows on Two Landscapes," Canadian Literature, no. 5 (Summer 1960), 7-20.

--------. "Wolf in the Snow: Part Two, The House Repossessed" Canadian Literature, no. 6 (Autumn 1960), 41-48.

Thomas, Clara. Canadian Novelists 1920-1945. Toronto: Longmans, 1946.

Warwick, Jack. The Long Journey. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968.

Individual Authors

BALLANTYNE, R.M.

Quayle, Eric. "R.M. Ballantyne in Rupert's Land," Queens Quarterly, LXXV (Spring 1968), 63-71.

Selby, Joan. "Ballantyne and the Fur Traders," Canadian Literature, no. 18 (Autumn 1963), 40-46.

GORDON, CHARLES

Beharriell, Ross. Introduction to The Man From Glengarry by Ralph Connor, 1901; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960, pp. vii-xii.

Gordon, Charles. Postscript to Adventure. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938.

Gordon, Charles, Jr. "Ralph Connor and the New Generation," Mosaic III (Spring 1970), 11-18.

Thompson, J. Lee and John H. Thompson. "Ralph Connor and the Canadian Identity," Queens Quarterly, LXXIX (Summer 1972), 159-170.

Watt, Frank W. "Western Myth, the World of Ralph Connor," Canadian Literature (Summer 1959), 26-36.

GROVE, F.P.

Ayre, Robert. "Canadian Writers of Today -- Frederick Philip Grove" Canadian Forum, XII (April 1932), 255-257.

Birbalsingh, Frank. "Grove and Existentialism" Canadian Literature, no. 43 (Winter 1970), 67-76.

Clarke, G.H. "A Canadian Novelist and His Critics," Queens Quarterly, LIII (August 1946), 362-368.

Dudek, Louis. "The Literary Significance of Grove's Search," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 89-99.

Eggleston, Wilfrid. "F.P.G.: The Ottawa Interlude," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 101-110.

--------. "Frederick Philip Grove," in Our Living Tradition. First Series, Edited by Claude Bissell, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957, pp. 105-127.

Grove, F.P. "Apologia pro Vita et Opere Sua," Canadian Forum, XI (August 1931), 420-422.

--------. "Grove's Letters from the Mennonite Reserve," Introduced by Margaret Stobie, Canadian Literature, no. 59 (Winter 1974), 57-66.

Grove, F.P. "In Search of Myself," University of Toronto Quarterly, X (October 1940), 60-67.

--------. In Search of Myself. Toronto: Macmillan, 1946.

--------. "A Postscript to A Search for America," Queens Quarterly, XLIX (Autumn 1942), 197-213.

Holliday, W.B. "Frederick Philip Grove: An Impression," Canadian Literature, no. 3 (Winter 1960), 17-22.

Keith, W.J. "Grove's Over Prairie Trails: A Re-Examination," Literary Half-Yearly XIII, no. 2, 76-85.

--------"Grove's Search for America," Canadian Literature, no. 59 (Winter 1974), 57-66.

McMullen, Lorraine. "Women in Grove's Novels," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 67-76.

McMullin, Stanley. "Evolution Versus Revolution: Grove's Perception of History," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 77-88.

--------. "Grove and the Promised Land," Canadian Literature, no. 49 (Summer 1971), 10-19.

Merrett, Kathy. "Frederick Philip Grove: 'Spokesman of a Race,'" Unpublished paper, University of Alberta, October, 1970.

Nesbitt, Bruce H. "The Seasons: Grove's Unfinished Novel," Canadian Literature, no. 18 (autumn 1963), 47-51.

Noel-Bentley, Peter. "The Position of the Unpublished Jane Atkinson and The Weatherhead Fortunes," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 13-33.

Pacey, Desmond. Frederick Philip Grove. Toronto: Ryerson, 1945.

--------, ed. Frederick Philip Grove. Toronto: Ryerson, 1970.

--------. "Frederick Philip Grove: A Group of Letters," Canadian Literature, no. 11 (Winter 1962), 28-38.

--------. "Frederick Philip Grove," Manitoba Arts Review, III (Spring 1943), 28-41.

--------. "In Search of Grove in Sweden: A Progress Report," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Winter 1972), 69-73.

Parker, M.G. Introduction to Fruits of the Earth by F.P. Grove, 1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965, pp. vii-xiii.

Phelps, Arthur L. "Frederick Philip Grove," in his Canadian Writers. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1951, pp. 36-42.

Pierce, Lorne. "Frederick Philip Grove (1871-1948)," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd ser., XLIII (1949), sec. II, 113-119.

Riley, Anthony. "The German Novels of Frederick Philip Grove," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 55-66.

Ross, Malcolm. Introduction to Over Prairie Trails by Frederick Philip Grove, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957, pp. v-x.

Sandwell, B.K. "Frederick Philip Grove and the Culture of Canada," Saturday Night, LXI (November 24, 1945), 18.

Sanders, Thomas. "The Grove Papers," Queens Quarterly, LXX (Spring 1963), 22-29.

_____. Introduction to Settlers of the Marsh by F.P. Grove, 1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965; pp. vii-xiii.

_____. "The Novelist as Poet: Frederick Philip Grove," Dalhousie Review, XLIII (Summer 1963), 235-241.

Skelton, Isobel. "Frederick Philip Grove," Dalhousie Review, XIX (July 1939), 147-163.

Spettigue, Douglas. F.P.G. The European Years. Ottawa: Oberon, 1973.

_____. Frederick Philip Grove. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969.

_____. "Frederick Philip Grove in Manitoba," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 19-33.

_____. "The Grove Enigma Resolved," Queens Quarterly, LXXIX (Spring 1972), 1-2.

Stanley, C. "Frederick Philip Grove," Dalhousie Review, XXV (January 1946), 433-441.

_____. "Voices in the Wilderness," Dalhousie Review, XXV (July 1945), 173-181.

Stobie, Margaret. Frederick Philip Grove. New York: Twayne, 1973.

Sutherland, Ronald. Frederick Philip Grove. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969.

_____. "What was Frederick Philip Grove," Inscape, XI (Spring 1974), 1-11.

Watters, R.E. Introduction to Master of the Mill. 1944; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

HIEBERT, PAUL

Hiebert, Paul. "The Comic Spirit at Forty Below Zero," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 58-68.

Wheeler, A. "Up from Magma and Back Again with Paul Hiebert," Manitoba Arts Review, VI (Spring 1948), 3-14.

Wheeler, Lloyd. Introduction to Sarah Binks by Paul Hiebert, 1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964, pp. vii-xiii.

KREISEL, HENRY

Warhaft, S. Introduction to The Betrayal by Henry Kreisel, 1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971, pp. v-x.

KROETSCH, ROBERT

Brown, Russell M. "An Interview with Robert Kroetsch," University of Windsor Review, VII (Spring 1972), 1-18.

Cameron, Donald. "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Summer 1972), 48-52.

Moss, John. "Canadian Frontiers: Sexuality and Violence from Richardson to Kroetsch," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Summer 1973), 36-42.

New, W.H. "The Studhorse Quests," in his Articulating West. Toronto: New Press, 1972, pp. 179-186.

Ross, Morton. "Robert Kroetsch and his Novels," in Donald Stephens, ed., Writers of the Prairies. Vancouver: Universtiy of British Columbia Press, 1973, pp. 101-114.

Thomas, Peter. "Keeping Mum: Kroetsch's Alberta," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Spring 1973), 54-56.

LAURENCE, MARGARET

Bowering, George. "That Fool of a Fear; Notes on A Jest of God," Canadian Literature, no. 50 (Autumn 1971), 41-56.

Gameron, Donald. "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," in his Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 1. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

Djwa, Sandra. "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Fall 1972), 43-50.

Gotlieb, Phyllis. "On Margaret Laurence," Tamarac Review, XLIX (Third Quarter 1969), 76-80.

Killam, G.D. Introduction to A Jest of God by Margaret Laurence, 1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974, v-ix.

Laurence, Margaret. "Sources," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 80-84.

--------. "Ten Years Sentences," Canadian Literature, no. 41 (Summer 1969), 10-16.

New, W.H. Introduction to The Stone Angel by Margaret Laurence, 1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968, iii - x.

Pesando, Frank. "In a Nameless Land -- the Use of Apocalyptic Mythology in the Writings of Margaret Laurence," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Winter 1973), 53-57.

Read, S.E. "The Maze of Life: The Work of Margaret Laurence," Canadian Literature, no. 27 (Winter 1966), 5-14.

Thomas, Clara. "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Winter 1972), 65-68.

--------. Margaret Laurence. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969.

--------. "Proud Lineage: Willa Cather and Margaret Laurence," Canadian Review of American Studies, II (Spring 1971), 3-12.

MCCLUNG, NELLIE

Eggleston, Wilfred. "Nellie McClung: Crusader," Canadian Author and Bookman, XIX (September 1943), 21.

McClung, Nellie. Clearing in the West. 1935; rpt. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1964.

--------. The Stream Runs Fast. 1945; rpt. Thomas Allen, 1965.

MCCOURT, EDWARD

Baldwin, R.G. "Pattern in the Novels of Edward McCourt," Queens Quarterly, LXVIII (Winter 1962), 574-587.

Bevan, Allan. Introduction to Music at the Close by Edward McCourt, 1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966, pp. 7-11.

MARLYN, JOHN

Mandel, Eli. Introduction to Under the Ribs of Death by John Marlyn, 1957; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964, pp. 7-14.

MITCHELL, W.O.

Barclay, Patricia. "Regionalism and the Writer: A Talk with W.O. Mitchell," Canadian Literature, no. 14 (Autumn 1962), 53-56.

Cameron, Donald. "W.O. Mitchell: Sea Caves and Creative Partners," in his Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 2. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

McLay, C.M. "The Kite: A Study in Immortality," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Spring 1973), 43-48.

New, W.H. "A Feeling of Completion: Aspects of W.O. Mitchell," Canadian Literature, no. 17 (Summer 1963), 22-33.

Phelps, Arthur L. "W.O. Mitchell," in his Canadian Writers. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1951, pp. 94-102.

Sutherland, Ronald. "Children of the Changing Wind," Journal of Canadian Studies, V (November 1970), 3-11.

NIVEN, F.J.

Burpee, L.J. "Frederick Niven," Dalhousie Review, XXIV (April 1944), 74-76.

New, W.H. "Individual and Group Isolation in the Fiction of Frederick John Niven," M.A. Thesis, U.B.C. 1963.

--------. "A Life and Four Landscapes: Frederick John Niven," Canadian Literature, no. 32 (Spring 1967), 15-28.

Niven, F.J. Coloured Spectacles. London: Collins, 1938.

OSTENSO, MARTHA

King, Carlyle. Introduction to Wild Geese by Martha Ostenso, 1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961, pp v-x.

MacLellan, W.E. "Real 'Canadian Literature,'" Dalhousie Review, VI (October 1926), 18-23.

Mullins, S.G. "Some Remarks on Theme in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese," Culture, XXIII (December 1962), 359-362.

Thomas, Clara. "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," in Donald Stephens, ed., Writers of the Prairies. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973, pp. 39-50.

ROSS, SINCLAIR

Daniells, Roy. Introduction to As For Me and My House by Sinclair Ross, 1941; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957, pp. v-x.

Djwa, Sandra. "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Fall 1972), 43-50.

--------. "No Other Way; Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," Canadian Literature, no. 47 (Winter 1971), 49-66.

Fraser, Keath. "Futility at the Pump: the Short Stories of Sinclair Ross," Queens Quarterly, LXXVII (Spring 1970), 72-80.

Kostash, Myrna. "Discovering Sinclair Ross: It's Rather Late," Saturday Night, LXXXVII, no. 7, 33-37.

Laurence, Margaret. Introduction to The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories by Sinclair Ross, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968, pp. 7-12.

New, W.H. "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," Canadian Literature, no. 40 (Spring 1969), 26-32.

Ross, Sinclair. "On Looking Back," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 93-94.

Stephens, Donald. "Wind, Sun and Dust," Canadian Literature, no. 23 (Winter 1965), 17-24.

RYGA, GEORGE

Carson, Neil. "George Ryga and the Lost Country," Canadian Literature, no. 45 (Summer 1970), 33-40.

STEAD, R.J.C.

Elder, A.T. "Western Panorama: Settings and Themes in Robert J.C. Stead," Canadian Literature, no. 17 (Summer 1963), 44-56.

Saunders, Thomas. Introduction to Grain by R.J.C. Stead, 1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969, pp. v-xiii.

STRINGER, ARTHUR.

Lauriston, Victor. Arthur Stringer, Son of the North. Toronto: Ryerson, 1941.

WIEBE, RUDY

Cameron, Donald. "Rudy Wiebe: The Moving Stream is Perfectly at Rest," in his Conversations with Canadian Novelists - 2. Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

Robinson, J.M. Introduction to Peace Shall Destroy Many by Rudy Wiebe, 1962; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972, pp. 1-6.

Tiessen, Hildegard. "A Mighty Inner River: 'Peace' in the Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," Journal of Canadian Fiction, II (Fall 1973), 71-76.

Wiebe, Rudy. "Passage by Land," Canadian Literature, no. 48 (Spring 1971), 25-27.

WISEMAN, ADELE

Rosenthal, Helene. "Spiritual Ecology: Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice" in Donald Stephens, ed., Writers of the Prairies. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973, pp. 77-88.

Wiseman, Adele. "A Brief Anatomy of an Honest Attempt at a Pithy Statement about the Impact of the Manitoba Environment on my Development as an Artist," Mosaic, III (Spring 1970), 98-106